

relieved and glad to see how well things were passing off, Muriel was too much of a woman not to recognise that the brilliancy, the wit and gaiety of her hostess, which had impressed Humphrey so pleasantly, was only an assumed and cleverly acted mood.

Indeed Muriel's gentle heart felt sorry for her friend. She had gone farther beneath the surface of Josephine's usually cold hard self than she had been aware until this moment; and loving Humphrey as she did so devotedly it was an easy matter for her to picture what Josephine must be suffering now.

However, not by a word or sign did Muriel intend to let Josephine know her secret was shared by another. The only way in which she helped her friend was to fall in with her mood, and make the evening as pleasant as it could be.

Sir Humphrey found himself alone for a moment. After dinner he went out through the long windows, and stood on the terrace smoking his cigar, his eyes and thoughts fixed on the little village away in the distance which had suddenly become to him an earthly paradise.

The *frou-frou* of a woman's dress broke his dream by-and-by; and Josephine came up to him, looking stately and handsome in her dinner-gown and gleaming jewels.

"Am I intruding?" she asked, lightly. Humphrey laughed and coloured—he threw away his cigar.

"You are always welcome, Lady Bridgeworth."

Josephine smiled faintly out in the moonlight. She looked very pale.

"I want to have a little chat with you," she said, and she sank into one of the big, cushioned chairs standing near. "Why did you throw away your cigar? Please light another. I love the scent. I am afraid I am one of those abominations—a woman who enjoys smoking!" She leaned back, and furled and unfurled her large feather fan, the moonlight picking flashes and myriad gleams from the diamonds on her strong white hands.

Humphrey looked at those involuntarily. They were well shaped, but, somehow, they were not womanly. His thoughts went to those little weak, clinging fingers that he had kissed so passionately, and again his heart beat wildly and melodiously.

He took a chair as she motioned him to do, but he did not light another cigar.

"I am waiting for our chat," he said, with a smile, as a long pause ensued.

Josephine had been thinking swiftly. She knew that as yet he had learnt nothing of her past connection with Barbara; but how long would he remain in ignorance? Pride, apart from everything else, demanded that, if she could prevent it, he must never know the truth—never learn that story of deception and misery which lay like a canker in her prosperous, luxurious life.

She felt that she had but to demand secrecy from Barbara, and she would obtain it. She had gauged the girl's nature fully by this time; moreover, she had learnt something of Barbara's sweetness when she had been a child.

It was horrible, humiliating to have to come to terms with one whom she hated now in an almost terrible fashion; but Josephine chose this humiliation rather than the one that would follow, did Humphrey learn the story of her life before she met Sir Charles Bridgeworth.

"It was absolutely necessary," she said to herself, calmly, and with quiet deliberation. They were not married yet, and who could say what would happen in this most uncertain world!

Her face wore its most gentle expression as she sat leaning back in the big chair, with Humphrey looking at her.

"I want you to do something for me," she said, speaking at last.

"Dear Lady Bridgeworth, anxiously you know anything in—"

"Of course," she broke in with a smile. "I

am quite sure you would do anything in the world for anybody, if you could help them."

"I hope I am a decent sort of friend," Humphrey said, quietly, "and you are not anybody, Lady Bridgeworth! You are very much 'somebody.'"

She laughed. "You pay such pretty compliments; but now to the business of the moment. I want you to do me a favour."

Humphrey waited to go on. "I don't think it is necessary to talk about what is past; we all make mistakes"—the big fan was unfurled for a moment, and then closed again—"and I am a very ordinary individual, and make some very big and stupid mistakes. Oh! yes, indeed. I assure you it is more than possible, Sir Humphrey. Well," the strong little fingers were closed tightly over the fan now, "I—I made a great mistake over that lovely little thing. I misjudged her altogether; and then, don't you see, Sir Humphrey, being a very pig-headed person, I could not bring myself to acknowledge my mistake graciously, and do my best to make amends. I must needs go and make things worse by continuing in the mistake. I hope you understand what I mean?"

"I think I do—no, I am sure I do," Humphrey said, and he held out his hand impulsively. "Dear Lady Bridgeworth, please don't say any more. I—I am convinced. I can answer for my—for Barbara, that she has already forgotten your anger."

"Ah! but I shall not be happy until I hear from her own lips that such is the case," Josephine had put her hand into his strong sunburnt ones. The touch gave her a series of exquisite pleasures; but she winced and drew hers away again when she found that to him she was nothing, and that every nerve in his body was beating for Barbara Verulam.

"Nothing can be easier, surely?" cried Sir Humphrey. He was indeed, delighted. Josephine then meant to be more than friendly to his little love.

He already pictured to himself, Barbara's delight when she found there would be no ground for fear from the great Lady Bridgeworth, and that her good, kind friends would remain on undisturbed, or hurt through her.

He naturally only imagined that Barbara's fears had arisen by the remembrance of Lady Bridgeworth's power in Torchester.

The incident of Josephine's personally expressed animosity to the girl had never been told him, and it was Josephine's intention he never should be told. She pressed her lips a little together at the different tone in his voice when he spoke of Barbara.

"I hope you are right," she said, slowly. "I am, as you know, very fond of Muriel. You are my dear friend, and—I should like to be able to call your wife my friend also."

Humphrey's whole being thrilled at those two words, "your wife." What a vista of glorious happiness, of content! They called up the future when he would have the absolute right to protect and shield his little one from all sorrow and trouble—the future, when his bird would have fluttered home to his nest at Brackbury, there to live as his fairy, his gleam of sunshine, and make the old house radiant with her presence.

His voice was not quite steady as he answered Josephine, but he reiterated, again and again, what to him was a conviction that Barbara would only be glad and honoured, even so he was, to call Lady Bridgeworth her friend.

"I am so pleased you think so; for, of course, you will have had some little conversation with her about that dreadful Lady Bridgeworth," Josephine said, with a laugh.

Humphrey shook his head. "No. Indeed, the only time your name was mentioned was yesterday, when she said she feared you were angry with Mrs. Griffiths and her son for giving her shelter, and she feared you would be tempted to—"

"Yes, yes, I know. Poor little thing! Oh! dear, Sir Humphrey, how shall I set myself

right in her eyes? I feel I have been such a brute, and now I want to make my peace if I can. Do help me, please."

Humphrey forgot how very nearly he had come to the conclusion only this day that she had indeed behaved as a brute to Barbara.

He could never bear malice, however, and her penitence and distress was so sincere, to him his one feeling was to help her to forget what she called her mistake as quickly as possible.

"If there is anything I can do," he began. Josephine rose from her chair; her head looking regal and handsome, with its small coronet of diamonds, that shed a sort of lustre about her.

"I feel if you are with me all will go well, and yet," with a hasty thought, "perhaps it will be more gracious if I say all I ought to say by myself. In any case, however, Sir Humphrey, will you drive me over to Torchester when you go to-morrow?"

Humphrey acquiesced willingly, although he felt a sort of regret that he would not be able to take Muriel as he had intended doing. She could and would go later in the day, he knew; but his love for his sister was very great, and he did not desire she should feel slighted, or put on one side even for a moment.

To his pleasure, however, Muriel was only full of satisfaction when he told her of Josephine's proposed arrangement, as they joined the rest scattered about on the lawn.

"I am so glad, darling, glad in every sense, for your sake and little Barbara's, and for the sake of dear, kind Mrs. Griffiths. And I was wrong to doubt Josephine for a moment. She may be cold, but she has a heart of gold, and so you will find, Humphrey."

"I am sure of it," Sir Humphrey agreed very warmly.

He felt more touched than he could express by what he considered the generous desire of this proud woman to acknowledge her wrong. Henceforth he would always enter it an honour to call such an one his friend.

He put his arm about Muriel's slender figure, and together they strolled about under the trees under the moonlight, talking in their old familiar way of a hundred different things, but always drifting back to the subject of Barbara—poor, beautiful, friendless, little Barbara.

"Perhaps she is not so friendless, Humphrey," Muriel said once. "Verker is a good name. There must be some connections, surely!"

"We will talk of all this when she is a little stronger. At present, poor child, she shrinks from speaking of herself. She is so fond of this brother—infernal blackguard!" Humphrey's voice was full of contempt and anger. "We must be lenient with her on that score, however; must we not, baby? Try and put yourself in her place!"

Muriel pressed her head down on his arm. "That is not possible, Humphrey," she said, "for you are an angel, and you know it, my darling."

"An angel am I?" Sir Humphrey laughed, but his voice was tender. "Well, I think I am when I remember I have you for a sister, Muriel."

And then they wandered on into the shadows; and Josephine laughed and chattered to her other guests, but let her eyes always follow that tall, stalwart frame, that handsome head with its sunny-brown curls, its frank, laughing eyes, that could grow so passionate.

Her face now and then became cold and pale, but no one noticed it in the moonlight; and everyone remarked that night Lady Bridgeworth did, indeed, merit the verdict of the world that called her a clever and brilliant woman, and that she was worthy even a higher position than that which now was hers.

CHAPTER XIV.

True to their agreement Humphrey and Lady Bridgeworth drove off almost immedi-

ately after breakfast to the Rectory in Torchester village.

"I shall take Time," Josephine said, lightly; "for, of course, you will not return with me, Sir Humphrey?"

Humphrey coloured. He had been wondering whether this would be expected of him;

"I cannot let you drive back alone!" he said, hurriedly.

Josephine laughed.

"Why not. Do you think I can't take care of myself? Ask Time! I assure you I am a very decent whip!"

"You knew I did not mean that!" Humphrey said, hurriedly, and with almost a touch of reproach in his voice.

Her eyes fell beneath his eyes, and her heart thrilled. There was a moment's agony to endure. As hour succeeded hour she realised more the bitterness of her disappointment; the pain became keener and less easy to bear.

Oh! the horrible thought that she was nothing to him—the humiliation, in remembering that all her power, all her fascination, was as nothing beside the weak, wan loveliness of this girl.

"It is very hot!" she declared, suddenly; Humphrey assented.

"And you look pale. Are you quite well?" he asked, with sincere anxiety.

She coloured faintly, and a softer look came on her face in that moment. She looked younger and more attractive.

"I have a woman's unfailing sentiment—a slight headache," she said, smiling up into his face. "A mere nothing!"

Humphrey got down resolutely.

"You shall certainly not drive in all this heat, Lady Bridgeworth!"

His masterful tone gave her a thrill of delight; but she did not mean to gratify him. The work she had set herself to do must be done at once.

She looked at him pleadingly, letting her eyes dwell on his for a moment.

"Please let me go!" she said, with all the simplicity of a child.

Humphrey had quite a different feeling for her to-day. He had never seen her in this mood. Josephine gentle, and almost weak, appealed to him for more than she had done even in her most brilliant frame of mind.

"Do you think you are wise?" he asked, cautiously, himself longing to be off; but his innate kindness repressed his own longing.

She nodded her head.

"Let us say no more. See, I am so comfortable! There is sure to be a little air driving—it will do me good; and, besides," she bit her lip, coloured, and bent her eyes for a moment, "besides, I cannot rest until I have done what you know I am longing to do. Come, let us start!"

Josephine sat quiet beside him as they drove along. She let her eyes rest without restraint from under the shadow of her large sunshade upon his handsome face, his wonderful out profile, the firm mouth and chin, the well-poised head.

She did not know herself in the new mood that the influence of this man had brought upon her.

She felt as if the bonds and chains that had held her in check had been snapped asunder, and the full tide of a stormy, passionate, reckless woman's nature was let loose upon her.

She was amazed in a vague sort of way at her own depth and intensity of feeling. She had not thought it possible that any living creature would have had power to change her so. She had not dreamed that a rebound and a stronger struggle would have awaited her in life.

A struggle! Yes, that was the word—an awful struggle against pride, vanity, and this flood of passionate longing and yearning.

Josephine's thoughts were a confused medley as she drove through the early morning, with Humphrey Lascelles beside her.

There was no fixed plan in her mind, nothing definite and absolute; only a sort of curious, sudden resolve, that seemed to strengthen and

strengthen, that the struggle with herself should end, and the fight should be against the apparently fixed fate of the moment.

She had taken this ride for one reason—and a very good one it had seemed to her; but as they neared the village it dawned in her mind that there was another and more insidious one driving her on.

Humphrey, seeing her pale and quiet, imagined her to be suffering, and was, in consequence, more gentle and full of sympathy.

He was touched by her desire to make such speedy amends for her former harshness.

Muriel was right. Her heart is good as gold, but she does not wear it on her sleeve for all the world to see and wonder at.

His face was flushed and full of eagerness as he approached the Rectory.

Josephine turned sick as she watched the lovelight grow in his eyes.

"And I am to him no more than a stone in the road," she thought, with sullen passion.

She had to call all her wits to her aid. She had a difficult task to perform—one that girded her to her very soul—but she would not fail, she must not fail. As she was winning back his esteem so she must win this other.

After all, she was only a poor, puny thing, weak in mind and body. How was it possible that he could stand against such a woman as Josephine Bridgeworth?

Humphrey assisted her to alight and opened the gate.

"I see her," he said, in a low hurried voice, his face paling a little. "I—I will just go and tell her you are come, Lady Bridgeworth."

Josephine followed him down the path in a mechanical fashion. She was conscious only of the suffocating sensation in her throat, and that sort of compressed horrible pain at her heart.

The struggle against fate was growing more difficult at every step. The mortification she suffered in this moment is indescribable, but the resolve to go on with the fight grew greater and greater.

She walked slowly towards the old orchard, her eyes seeing nothing but his eager, handsome face. Her heart winces as at a dagger thrust as she saw him hold Barbara's two little hands in his for a moment; then bend his head, and kiss them reverently.

"She has her triumph," Josephine said to herself. "She is queen. I am only a stone in the road—a speck of dust to be brushed on one side. Oh Heaven! if I did not care; but I love him! I love him! I love him better than my life itself!"

Barbara had shrunk back as she saw that stately figure coming towards her. It was as though some chill wind had suddenly swept through the old garden.

Humphrey felt her shrink, and his hold tightened on her hands.

"Lady Bridgeworth has driven all this way to say some pretty words of happiness to you, my sweet!" he said, hurriedly, eagerly, his voice low and laden with tenderest love.

"You will receive her warmly, Barbara, for my sake!"

Josephine was near enough to catch the last words, and she grew a shade paler.

"He has to bribe her to speak to me!" she said to herself.

She paused a moment, and then spoke out loud, in a voice as gentle and almost as tender as his own.

"You will give me one moment with your little sweetheart, Sir Humphrey?"

Humphrey turned round quickly, his hands clung to Barbara's little trembling ones for an instant; then he loosed his hold.

"I will go and find Mrs. Griffiths, and wish her good-morning," he said.

Josephine stood looking at Barbara as they were alone. The girl's loveliness was greater this day than it had been yet; the strange, the almost incomprehensible happiness that had come to her the night before had sent her such sleep as had rarely visited her young life before. She was invigorated by that sleep; she

was given new life and beauty by this happiness; she was no longer a wan, weak child.

Josephine had to realise that her rival was worthy even of her hatred.

Barbara stood waiting for this cold, pale woman to speak. She longed to be just, to be gentle, for Humphrey's sake; but the memory of Josephine's cruelty was still so new, and her woman's intuition made her doubtful and fearful of what lay beyond.

"I have come to ask you to forgive me," Josephine spoke at last.

She had never had occasion to act so well in all her prosperous career; but she read the girl's distrust and doubt, and it spurred her on.

Barbara must be won utterly, or those confused, reckless, passionate hopes, which as yet had scarcely taken definite form or shape, would wither and die in the hour of their birth.

She schooled her voice to be sweet and gentle.

"I want to be your friend, Barbara."

Barbara's lip trembled a moment. Then she looked across at Josephine, with her lovely eyes full of reproach.

"The other day," she said, gently, "you— you denied all knowledge of me."

Josephine's lips contracted.

"You are quite right to reproach me," she said, and her tone was that of a woman who suffered.

"I—I feel that you are right. Were I in your place I should find it hard to forget the cruelty I meted out to you; but perhaps you don't understand all I suffered, too, child, when I came face to face with you—a living remembrance of the most miserable past any woman could have had. I—I forgot everything in that moment but the recollection that Cyril Vereker had broken my heart, and that you were his sister!"

Barbara's colour flushed into her cheeks, and then paled. The mention of her brother brought back the memory of all his wrong-doing. In a dim sort of way she recollected that past when Pains had been constantly with her, and then one day had suddenly disappeared. The sight of Lady Bridgeworth's pale, agitated face touched her to the heart.

"Oh!" she said involuntarily, moving a step nearer, "do not even speak of it again. I—I understand. I know all now."

The tears of bitter sorrow rose to her beautiful eyes, and mingled with those of fraternal sympathy for Josephine.

"I—did not—I could not understand before, for you used to be so kind. But now—Oh Pains! please never say another word about it. I have nothing to forgive, and I will gladly be your friend if you will let me."

Josephine took the little outstretched hand in hers, and suppressed the sheer that naturally would have outflung her well on lip. How easy it was to work upon the feeling of others! They were as so many puppets in her hands.

"You fulfil the promise of your childhood, Barbara," she said, in the same subdued way, "generous and noble-minded as you were then. You have so much to forget and to forgive."

"It is easy to forget sometimes," the girl replied, her beautiful eyes resting with almost a yearning look on the woman before her.

Josephine smiled faintly. Then she bent forward, and she kissed the pretty brow. It was a Judas kiss; for her resolve to betray and embitter the life of this girl had grown definite and absolute in the last few minutes.

"I wish I could say as much," she said, stilling a sigh, "but forgetfulness is not for me. I have tried, Barbara, to put the past behind me, and for a time I almost succeeded, but your sudden appearance here has brought it all back again. Now that you understand this, all is explained to you!"

"All!" Barbara said gently, her pity awaking all the old affection she used to feel for the handsome girl who had mimed so much in that vague misty way in her life of a few years ago, "I wish I could help you to

forget," she said, suddenly. "I wish I could give you some happiness, Phina?"

Josephine winced at the old familiar name. "Happiness is not for me," she said, almost curtly; then she recovered herself, "but you can help me a little, Barbara."

"Tell me how! Only tell me how!"

Josephine looked at the lovely, eager face. The very fullness of Barbara Vereker's exquisite generosity of nature hardened her against the girl. She schooled her voice into its gentle tone with difficulty.

"I want you to help me to forget if I can. I want never to hear you speak of the past. I want you to keep all knowledge of it to yourself. It shall be a secret between us, Barbara, shared by no one—not even your Sir Humphrey. Will you promise me that?"

Barbara answered without a pause. "I promise you with all my heart. It is such a little thing to ask, and it will be easy! We will start from to-day, Phina. I will not call you Phina again, but you may call me Barbara; for you are so grand, and I am nobody. No one shall know from me that we ever met before!"

Josephine kissed her a second time. "Mr. Griffiths has some idea of it," she said, hurriedly. "Have you spoken?"

But Barbara reassured her. "Except on the first day when you came into that horrible place," she shivered and turned pale as she spoke. "I have never spoken your name. Mr. Griffiths knows nothing."

Josephine drew away her hand. "You understand. You do not think it strange?" she murmured.

"In your place," Barbara said, "I should do the same."

There was a pause for a moment. The same thought was in both their minds—the thought of Cyril.

"He will not come," Barbara faltered. "He has always said once out of England he would never return."

"You have heard from him?" asked Lady Bridgeworth, hurriedly.

The girl shook her head. "Not one word." Mr. Griffiths wrote to London two days ago, asking for any letters there might be for me. There were none.

Josephine's heart beat a little quicker. "But have you thought? He may see your marriage. Then he may come."

Barbara's face grew pale, and her eyes filled with tears.

"Cyril loves me," she said, gently, "and he will rejoice that—that I am so happy! Oh! there is some good in him!—great good, though he acts so wrongly. He would never do anything to spoil my happiness!"

Josephine was silent for a moment. How the old jealousy that used to rankle for the love Cyril had borne for the lovely child burst out anew! It seemed to her that at every turn Barbara had stood a barrier in her path. Though she had worshipped Cyril in these old days, lavishing a very tumult of passionate devotion upon him, she had never been as dear to him as the hem of Barbara's garment had been; and now, when for the second time a flame of love had risen in her heart, it was this same Barbara who stood between her and its glory, receiving all the homage and devotion for which she yearned. Incomparable actress as she was, she felt the strain of the moment too much for her. She turned abruptly.

"Here comes your lover!" she said, with a little laugh—a laugh that, somehow, rang discordantly in Barbara's ears and jarred on her nerves, though why or how this should be she could not very well have told.

Josephine went to meet Humphrey. "I have spoken my word," she said, giving an effective little sigh, "and all is well."

Sir Humphrey looked at her almost anxiously.

"I am sure you have overtaxed yourself this morning with this heat and your headache. Won't you rest for half-an-hour before

going on? It is deliciously cool in Mrs. Griffiths's drawing-room."

Josephine shook her head. "I must get home, and I—I am very glad we came. We are going to be great friends, your little Barbara and I. She tells me I may call her Barbara."

"I am so pleased!" Humphrey's face bore testimony to his words. He sent a look of intense love to that slim, graceful figure, standing shyly alone. How beautiful she was! How sweet, how pure! The language of his heart was written in his eyes; and Barbara understood it, dropping her little head like some delicate flower beneath his gaze. He walked with Josephine, and put her into her carriage.

"How can I thank you?" he said with genuine emotion, as she took the reins.

Josephine looked at looked at him.

"I want no thanks for anything I may do for you, Humphrey," she said. Then she smiled, and yet he could see her lip quiver even in that smile; "only in your great happiness think of others who are not so fortunate. *Au revoir!* We shall meet anon!"

Humphrey Lascelles had a curious sensation in his heart as he walked back to his little love. His faint idea of the evening before seemed to be made firmer and more decided. He had an uncomfortable longing to dismiss the thought of Josephine from his mind; and as he went hurriedly over to Barbara, standing just where he had left her, the sun falling on her uncovered head, the discomfort vanished, and love reigned in its stead.

"My heart! My life!" he said passionately, as he took in his arms, and kissed her sweet lips. "How have I lived without you all these years!"

(To be continued.)

THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

CHAPTER IX.—(continued.)

"THAT your refusal of me is complete and irrevocable?" Rosebury asked, after a pause.

"It is, my lord," was the gentle response.

Rosebury suppressed his anger by a strong effort, and said,—

"May I ask, Geraldine, if you love another?"

The maiden blushed quickly, and replied, with some confusion,—

"I cannot answer such a question, my lord. I have given you no right to ask it!"

"Well, I can see for myself!" declared Rosebury, bitterly, forgetting everything in his passion. "You love someone else, and it may not be difficult to guess who is the object of your love!"

The sudden pallor of the Lady Geraldine checked him, bringing him to his senses.

"Still, I shall not despair," he headed, changing his manner. "My devotion must ultimately make an impression upon your ladyship. You will permit me to remain your friend?"

The maiden bowed.

Rosebury, in his anger, had been about to taunt the Lady Geraldine with a love for Walter Lorraine, but he had checked himself in time to avoid hopelessly spoiling his own cause.

He now reflected that the artist had declared that he should never make known his love to its beautiful object, and he thought that it was quite possible that Geraldine's pride might have prevented her returning Walter's love.

In any case, he would still hope.

He devoted a few minutes to the endeavour to efface all memory of his late rudeness from the mind of the maiden, and he was successful. Geraldine pitied him, and was too generous to remember his angry words.

There was a smile on Rosebury's lips, but blackness in his heart, as he finally made his adieu to the maiden, and entered the corridor.

"Is his lordship, the Earl, at home?" he asked of the servant who attended to the door.

"Yes, my lord. He is in the library."

"Very well," returned Rosebury. "You need not announce me. His lordship expects me this morning."

He proceeded towards the library and entered it.

It was tenanted by the Earl of Lindenwood, who sat alone, his face buried in his hands.

He was aroused by the noise of Rosebury's entrance, and rose to welcome him.

"Good morning, my lord!" he exclaimed. "I am glad to see you—very glad indeed!"

"But you are ill, my lord!" responded Rosebury, regarding the Earl uneasily. "You are surely ill!"

"Oh, no. It's nothing but late hours," was the nervous response. "I was up late last night—in fact, I didn't sleep at all. Sit down, Rosebury, sit down. I want to talk with you."

Rosebury seated himself, and looked at the Earl with renewed uneasiness.

Certainly, one night's wakefulness could never have made so serious a change in the Earl's appearance.

His face was worn and haggard, and ghastly in its paleness. There were dark circles around his eyes that betrayed harrowing anxieties and cares. His mouth was drawn down at the corners with deep cut, rigid lines. Rosebury had never before noticed.

But his manner seemed stranger than his personal appearance.

He appeared uncontrollably nervous, started at the rustling of a paper or the sound of his visitor's voice, and continually cast apprehensive glances over his shoulders, and at the windows.

Rosebury also noticed that he still wore his ball costume, and that a withered rosebud dangled loosely in the buttonhole of his coat.

"I'm very glad to see you, Rosebury," declared the Earl, apparently unconscious that he had made the same observation before.

"Have you seen Geraldine?"

"I come to you fresh from her presence," returned Rosebury. "I have been having quite a conversation with her."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the Earl, regarding his visitor anxiously. "Did—did you propose to her?"

"I did!"

"And she accepted you?"

"No, she refused me!"

"Refused you? Impossible! Why, she as good as owned to me that she loved you last evening! This must be some girlish caprice. I will go to her and demand an explanation."

He half rose from his chair, but his visitor stretched out his hand to detain him, remarking,—

"Wait, my lord. I have much to say to you first. It is best that we understand each other."

The Earl flashed an apprehensive glance at his visitor, which Rosebury failed to notice, and he then said,—

"Yes, yes, Rosebury; let us understand each other. What do you wish to say to me?"

Rosebury hesitated a moment, in order to marshal his ideas into order, and then he said,—

"You have seemed to favour my suit with Geraldine, my lord, and have encouraged me to pay her my addresses."

"Yes, yes! Go on, if you please, Rosebury."

"You are greatly in debt," pursued the visitor; "so much so that my agreement to make you a handsome settlement on my marriage with your niece immediately ensured me your hearty co-operation?"

"Yes—quite true!"

"I have proposed to her, and have been rejected! But I am not the man to give up

when I reach an obstacle," declared Rosenbury, in a firm tone. "I love Geraldine madly—with all my strength! I am determined to possess her! She must and shall be mine! And your co-operation as her guardian is necessary to my success!"

The Earl bowed.
"You know well, my lord, the advantages she would derive from a union with me," pursued the visitor. "The name of Rosenbury is equal to any name in the land, in point of age and honour. You know how wealthy I am, and what are my habits. I could make her honoured and happy. I will now show you what you are to gain from this union!"

"Yes, do!" said the Earl, with sudden interest.

"Geraldine is very rich. No one knows the amount of her wealth better than yourself, my lord, although it is not in your hands! Coax, bribe, or force her to marry me, my lord, and half her fortune shall be paid without delay into your hands!"

"You are in earnest?" cried the Earl.

"In absolute earnest!"

"And you are willing to take her, if I force her to wed you?"

"I am, my lord. I am convinced that, once my wife, she would resign herself to her fate, and I should succeed in winning her love!"

"But, Rosenbury, do you know that half of Geraldine's fortune would be fifty thousand pounds? She has her mother's fortune, all her father could bestow upon her, and legacies from aunts, uncles, and grandparents."

"Yes, I understand all that, my lord; but I repeat my proposal!"

"And I accept it!" cried the Earl, his face brightening with his delight. "Geraldine shall be yours, Rosenbury. I swear it! Willing or unwilling, she shall marry you!"

He extended his hand, which Rosenbury clasped, and thus the compact was sealed.

"You say, my lord," said the visitor, with an exultant smile, "that Geraldine as good as owned last evening that she loved me. Are you quite sure that she meant me?"

The Earl almost started from his chair, as this question met his hearing, and he replied,—

"Who else could she have meant? I thought, of course, she meant you. She is certainly in love with someone. Her blushes must have had a cause!"

"Can you not think, my lord, of some one in whom she takes great interest?"

"There's Clairville, with whom she danced several times last evening; but she can't love him, for she told me she didn't. Then there's the Duke of Larvalion, but she don't like him! I'm sure I can't tell. Rosenbury. She has a host of admirers. You would be astonished to learn the number of suitors who have applied to me to use my influence in their favour—though, to be sure, not one of them has used the same arguments with me that you have!"

The Earl spoke rapidly and nervously, and with a gaiety that too plainly showed itself to be forced.

The reasons that had restrained Rosenbury from taunting Geraldine now prevented him from mentioning Walter Lorraine.

"How soon would you like the marriage to take place, Rosenbury?" asked the Earl, after a short silence.

"Any time—this time, if possible. The sooner the better!"

The Earl echoed the words with a sigh of relief.

"Then if you marry Geraldine this month," he said, "you will pay me the fifty thousand pounds in cash this month?"

Rosenbury assented.

The two men conversed a long time upon the subject, maturing the plans, plotting for every emergency that might arise, and Rosenbury saw that the Earl would put forth every effort for his interests.

"You may make all your preparations for your bridal, Rosenbury," at length declared

the Earl. "Geraldine has every respect for me as her uncle, and for my authority as her guardian. She will obey me in this matter—particularly when she sees that no other course remains open to her!"

With this assurance still ringing in his ears, Rosenbury at length took his departure in high spirits.

CHAPTER X.

Great souls by instinct to each other turn,
Demand alliance, and in friendship burn.

—Addison's Campaign.

LORD ROSENbury had not been long gone when Lady Rosenbury called at Lindenwood House, and was ushered into the morning-room where Geraldine still sat musing. With a cry of pleasure the girl sprang up, and was clasped in a tender embrace.

Despite the difference in their ages, there was a strong friendship between the two ladies. The tender, majestic beauty of Lady Rosenbury had first attracted the lonely heart of Geraldine; and her timid advances had been met with such loving kindness that she loved her friend as she would have loved her mother had she lived, while Lady Rosenbury felt at first a pity for the orphan girl that had ripened into a motherly affection.

Geraldine was not without many feminine friends, and she had also a chaperon and companion combined, but she regarded none of them with the love which she gave to Lady Rosenbury.

"You look as bright, my dear, as though balls were unknown," said her ladyship, playfully. "I almost expected to find that you had not risen. Did you have a pleasant time last evening?"

"Not particularly," replied Geraldine. "I was disappointed because you were not here, and because—"

She hesitated and blushed.

"And because who else was not, my dear?" asked Lady Rosenbury, with a smile, as she drew the maiden to a seat with her upon a sofa.

"May I guess?"

Geraldine blushed even more intensely, but made no reply.

"Was it Raymond you missed, my dear?" asked her ladyship, somewhat anxiously.

Geraldine replied in the negative.

Lady Rosenbury gave a sigh of relief, and said,—

"Then it must have been my favourite, Walter Lorraine! Was it not?"

The maiden's confusion answered for her. Lady Rosenbury drew the girl nearer to her, kissed her fondly and with a sort of lingering tenderness, but made no further allusion to Walter.

But in her heart she felt convinced that the young artist's love was returned by Lady Geraldine.

With characteristic delicacy, she carefully refrained from allowing any word to escape her that could show the maiden that her secret was discovered, and she skillfully turned the subject by saying,—

"Speaking of Raymond, my dear, has he called upon you this morning?"

"Yes, dear Lady Rosenbury; he left the house but a little while ago!"

There was a hesitation about the manner of the Lady Geraldine as she made this reply that aroused the curiosity of her friend, but she made no effort to elicit her confidence.

It was soon voluntarily accorded her, Geraldine remarking—

"Lord Rosenbury will probably soon relate to you the particulars of our interview this morning, and I prefer you should hear them first from me. He did me the honour of making me a proposal of marriage."

"And your answer, my dear?"

"I—I refused him! I could not do otherwise, dear Lady Rosenbury. Indeed I could not. You will not be offended with me?"

"Offended with you, my dear Geraldine!" exclaimed Lady Rosenbury. How little you

understand me! If you do not love Raymond, I should be the last person in the world to advise you to marry him!"

"Oh, thank you, my dear friend. You will think me foolish, will you not, when I tell you I actually hesitated about refusing him on your account? I did not know but it might make a barrier between us?"

"Nonsense!" returned her ladyship, with a smile, and a kiss upon the maiden's pure forehead. "What a curious idea that would be—marry a gentleman because you love his mother! So, you don't love Raymond, Geraldine?"

She replied in the negative.

"It is better so! I should dearly have loved to call you my daughter, Geraldine, for you seem very near to me, but your nature is deeper and grander than Raymond's. He could never have appreciated you, or made you happy," and Lady Rosenbury sighed. "The instinct that led you to refuse him was a wise one. Raymond will marry some pretty butterfly of fashion, who will be better suited to him. I wish he had been more suited to you!"

Geraldine looked up with a wondering expression.

"Ah, you are astonished that I don't praise Raymond to you, my dear! I see you are," and her ladyship smiled. "I have been frank with you, but I have told you no more than you already knew. I wish Raymond were more like Walter Lorraine!"

Geraldine's head dropped upon Lady Rosenbury's bosom.

"And speaking of Walter reminds me of my errand hither," pursued the visitor. "He has been painting a picture for me which is just finished after the labour of months. I want you to see it on the easel as well as I, and share my surprise and pleasure. Will you go to the studio with me?"

"Would—would it be proper for me to go?" faltered Geraldine.

"Do you think, my dear, I would ask you to go where your presence would be improper?" responded Lady Rosenbury, playfully.

"But Wal—Mr. Lorraine might think me presumptuous in coming!"

"Any friend of mine will always be welcome at his studio. Ah! I see you will go. My carriage is at the door, and I will occupy myself with your books until you get ready!"

Geraldine gave her friend an impulsive kiss, and withdrew to prepare herself for the proposed call.

"The dear girl!" thought Lady Rosenbury, when she found herself alone. "What a pity that two noble hearts like hers and Walter's should be for ever kept apart because the father of one bore a title and the father of the other was a humble gardener! It does not seem to me right. Raymond has had his opportunity, and Walter shall now have his! If I can bring about an understanding between Walter and Geraldine to-day, I shall be supremely happy! I think, with the fortune I shall bestow upon Walter, I can make matters right with the Earl!"

From this, the reader will readily perceive that her ladyship had thought more deeply and seriously about Walter's communication since their parting than before. She had reasoned that there was no cause why her favourite should not be happy, and her kind heart instantly set to work to bring about his happiness.

While her ladyship was thus interesting herself in the fortunes of the young artist and Geraldine, the latter was trying on dress after dress, rejecting one and all, much to the dissatisfaction of her maid.

"It seems to me that I can find nothing becoming to me!" she said. "I will wear the one I have on now. It looks as well as any!"

The one in question was a maize-coloured tissue that was extremely becoming to the bright, dark beauty of its wearer.

The toilet—never before so difficult—was soon completed, and the Lady Geraldine rejoined her guest.

"It will not be necessary to speak to my uncle," she said, as they went through the corridor. "He has not been at all well to-day, and refused to come to breakfast or to see me. In fact, he has seen no one to-day excepting a strange gentleman who called very early this morning—and Lord Rosenbury. I have been quite alarmed about him, but he sent me word by his page that I was to take no notice at all of his illness!"

Lady Rosenbury expressed her sorrow at this intelligence, and a hope that his lordship would be well on the morrow, and they then entered the Rosenbury carriage, and its fair owner gave the order to be driven to Adelphi-terrace.

CHAPTER XI.

The storm of grief bears hard upon his youth,
And bends him, like a drooping flower, to earth.
—Rowe.

WALTER LORRAINE was in his studio, with his jaunty cap on one side of his head, and his slender form enveloped in his gorgeous dressing-gown, when his lovely visitors were announced, and he came forward to receive them, with many expressions of delight.

"I hardly expected you to-day, dear Lady Rosenbury," he exclaimed, "and I am sure that no one could be more welcome or unexpected than the Lady Geraldine."

Geraldine blushed under his earnest, admiring glances; and then, as he turned towards his companion, she stole a timid glance into his handsome face, which looked pale, but not grief-stricken.

The thought that he was not mourning in consequence for the death of Mrs. Lorraine gave her great comfort, and her spirits immediately became buoyant.

"I suppose I may behold my picture now, Walter!" said Lady Rosenbury, smiling. "I assure you I am quite impatient to do so."

By way of reply, Walter wheeled the easel into the best light, and conducted the ladies to it.

They stood in perfect silence as they gazed upon it, and the young artist anxiously watched the expressions of their faces for their verdict.

Long before a single word was uttered he knew their opinions.

Their kindling faces, their rapt expressions, all showed the admiration they could not conceal.

The silence was at length broken by Lady Rosenbury, who turned and clasped the hand of the young artist, exclaiming,—

"Walter, I am proud of you!"

"You are a true artist, Walter," continued her ladyship. "This picture surpasses all your others, and bears the stamp of true genius."

"I—I cannot tell you how much I admire and appreciate it, Mr. Lorraine," faltered the Lady Geraldine. "I feel its great beauty, and quite long to lose myself in those cool dim aisles among the trees."

Walter expressed his pleasure and gratitude at their complimentary remarks, and Lady Rosenbury exclaimed,—

"Look, Geraldine, at that lovely Eve on her mound of flowers!"

"She is very—very charming!" replied the maiden, with some hesitation.

"Of course she is, my dear, for do you notice that she wears your face? Why, Walter," added Lady Rosenbury, "you have made an excellent likeness of the Lady Geraldine. Did you intend it?"

Both the young people blushed, and the artist answered,—

"Yes, I intended it, dear Lady Rosenbury. I wanted to paint a perfect woman, and—and so I couldn't help making a picture of the Lady Geraldine."

Lady Rosenbury was greatly charmed at this confession—much more so than if she herself had been its object—and she stole a

rapid glance at Geraldine to see if she had listened to it unmoved.

The maiden had dropped her head, but one intensely scarlet cheek was revealed to her friend.

"The picture will have a double value to me, my dear Walter," said Lady Rosenbury, after a brief silence, "from having Lady Geraldine's portrait in it, and under all those charming accessories of flowers and sunbeams and shady bowers. You have a very vivid imagination, my dear boy, and your picture is well worthy its title—The Temples of Eden."

"I am glad, dear Lady Rosenbury," returned Walter, with emotion, "that I have at last something to offer you that may not be deemed unworthy your acceptance. It is fitting that the first fruits of the genius you have cultivated should be laid at your feet. Would that the picture were equal to my conceptions of what it should be!"

"In conception and execution, my dear Walter, there is nothing left to be desired. I repeat that I am proud of you."

The tears sprang to the artist's eyes, and he regarded her ladyship with a look of loving admiration.

"My dear Geraldine," said her ladyship, "you have not so good a position as I to look at the picture. As I am to have it all my life, allow me to give you my place while I look over Walter's portfolios of engravings."

She gave place to Geraldine and retreated to the window, quite delighted at her innocent stratagem in throwing the young people into each other's society.

"I am sure that Walter's stern resolution must give way now," she thought, making a pretence of looking over a pile of engravings. "At any rate, he shall have a chance to declare his love if he wishes to do so!"

While she was thinking thus benevolently of their welfare, the young people themselves stood in silent embarrassment.

The Lady Geraldine was the first to recover her self-possession and to speak.

"I should like a copy of this picture," she said, "or at least another painting from your hand, Mr. Lorraine! Why do you not have this put on exhibition? It would add greatly to your fame!"

"I do not care to exhibit it, Lady Geraldine. But the wish you have so kindly expressed to have another of my paintings shall be gratified. I feel highly honoured by your desire!"

A short silence succeeded, and then Walter said,—

"You are not offended with me, Lady Geraldine, for having made you the priestess in my picture?"

"Offended, Mr. Lorraine?" exclaimed the maiden, in surprise. "Offended because you have paid me such a delicate compliment—because you have caused me to share in some slight degree your fame? Oh no! How could you think so?"

"I did not know but your pride might revolt at the liberty I had taken, Lady Geraldine. I should not have done it had not the picture been painted for your dearest friend and mine—Lady Rosenbury?"

"So you thought me proud, Mr. Lorraine?"

"Are you not?" asked Walter.

"Yes, I have pride, Mr. Lorraine, but not the pride you mean. My pride would prevent me doing a dishonourable action, or being weak and foolish, even if I had not principle to sustain me. My pride demands that I shall be worthy of my own self-respect!"

"And you have no pride in your birth and station, Lady Geraldine?" asked Walter, anxiously.

The maiden hesitated a moment, and then replied,—

"Why certainly, Mr. Lorraine, it is pleasant to reflect that one can look back upon a long line of ancestors who were renowned for their wisdom and bravery, but I do not place too much importance upon such things. Another person, of humble birth, perhaps, may have had ancestors as good and noble-hearted as mine, for

there is a great deal of unwritten heroism in this world. And then it is often the case that the descendant of a noble line is a very unworthy man. Good principles do not always go with the blood!"

"Then, Lady Geraldine, you do not consider the rank of your acquaintances before you become friendly with them?"

"No, indeed. I look only to the person in question in forming friends. If the person is good and noble, I care little whether his father worked for his living, or lived upon other's work!"

Lady Geraldine had expressed her opinion without a thought of their bearing towards the listener; but she was aroused to consciousness of the meaning that might be put upon them, as Walter said, timidly,—

"Would these principles guide you in selecting a husband, Lady Geraldine? Pardon the question, but I am anxious to know if one so noble as yourself would wed beneath her?"

The young lady blushed, and replied, in an embarrassed manner,—

"No, I would never wed beneath me, Mr. Lorraine. By that, I mean I would not marry one whom I could not respect and revere as well as love; some one on whom I could lean, with every faith in his superior wisdom. As one cannot have everything, I should not be particular as to my husband's birth or fortune. Of course," she added, with a smile, "even if I loved, I would never marry a person whose relatives I should be ashamed of. They might be poor, but I should think none the less of them for that. But I should object to calling a dissolute, intemperate person 'father,' or an idle, slatternly woman 'mother.' You comprehend me?"

By the last two or three sentences the Lady Geraldine imagined that she had removed all personal application from her remarks, and had given them a sort of general tone.

Her words rang in Walter's ears, imparting hope to his great love for her.

As her concluding sentences had not been intended to apply to him, so he gave no heed to them, but derived encouragement from what had preceded.

His countenance was suddenly transfigured by the great love he felt for her, and it showed itself in his luminous eyes, in the quiver of his sensitive mouth, and in the half-restrained eagerness of his manner.

But she, fearing she had said too much, had turned her gaze upon the picture, and noticed none of these things.

"Lady Geraldine," began Walter, in a tone tremulous with feeling, "dear Lady Geraldine, I—"

He paused abruptly.

If he had been, indeed, about to make a declaration of his passion to its object, his design was frustrated, for the door leading into the ante-room was rudely burst open, and an ill-looking man entered.

It was Colte Lorraine!

He wore the same garments as on his previous visit, and displayed in addition a quantity of cheap jewellery, which added to the vulgarity of his appearance.

His countenance wore an expression of good-natured ineptitude, owing to the fact that he was under the influence of ardent spirits. One eye was half-closed, giving him what is popularly termed a "knowing" expression, and his battered hat was set rakishly on one side, and a little at the back of his shod head.

He was pursued into the studio by Parkin, who had vainly endeavoured to keep him out, and whose countenance now expressed the deepest indignation of his unwarrantable intrusion.

"Le'm'be, le'm'be!" ejaculated Lorraine, assuming a menacing attitude. "Away, Tha! I say, Wri'er, where are you? Wal'er!"

Walter was overwhelmed with astonishment and mortification.

If the earth would only have opened at that moment and swallowed him up, he would have been intensely thankful.

Alas, now, for all his dreams of love! Geraldine, with the repugnance to be expected from one so refined and so daintily nurtured, shrank before the coarse intruder, and crept nearer to Walter as if for protection.

She had not the slightest idea that the handsome artist could have aught in common with this degraded being.

Lady Rosbury arose and approached Walter also, but she scrutinised the intruder narrowly, his countenance looking familiar to her.

"Come out here!" cried Parkin. "See, here, follow, you leave, or I'll call the police!" "I tell you, I'll," responded Lorraine, "want see Walter. Where are you, my son? Ah, see you! Don't tend to deny poor old father, do ye? Heart yearns over ye, Walter."

With this remark, he tottered towards the artist and extended his hand.

Walter's cheek burned, and he endeavoured to summon his self-possession, but he felt indescribably humiliated. He extended his hand mechanically, without thinking of what he was doing, and Lorraine grew quite mad with over it, shaking it again and again.

As Parkin beheld this recognition of the stranger, he retreated to the ante-room, convinced that the fellow was some person of extremely eccentric habits, but of good repute.

"Entaining friend, eh, Walter?" remarked Lorraine, tipping back his hat, and balancing himself alternately upon his heels and toes. "That's right, my son. Youth's time for gaiety. Find it so myself. Ah, is't possible? Whom I behold? Is't la'ship? Yes, 's Lady Rosbury. How's la'ship do?"

"Walter, is this man your father?" asked Lady Rosbury, recovering from her astonishment. "Is he really alive, and returned from Australia?"

"Jes, so, la'ship," said Lorraine, interrupting the artist. "Sit exactly. Sure, la'ship, feel highly honoured at seein' you here, in such a fren'ly way," and his manner grew important. "Walter don't say much, but he feels honoured too. Speak up, my boy. We 'preciate this visit, don't we?"

"Will you go into the inner chamber, father, until I am at liberty?" said Walter, in a clear tone, though the room seemed to reel around him. "I will see you by-and-by."

"Shamed yer poor old father, Walter?" asked Lorraine, unavailing. "Needn't be. I'm as good as any one. La'ship don't feel 'bove me!"

"I think you had better follow Walter's advice," observed Lady Rosbury, sharing her favourite's mortification and chagrin. "When we are gone, Walter will be at liberty to talk with you."

"La'ship puts on airs, eh? Better not. I could say things—but won't! Got secret, though. Know where I'll be well treated, if you and Walter turn on me!"

He balanced himself more defiantly, and looked at each member of the group.

"Pretty girl—very pretty girl!" he remarked, regarding the Lady Geraldine with the air of a connoisseur in feminine beauty. "Come see Walter, eh? Walter's han'some. You'd make a pretty couple, if do say it."

Walter made another effort to induce him to withdraw, and this time his voice and manner were stern and decisive.

Lorraine braced himself, however, and persisted in his dogged obstinacy, and Lady Rosbury remarked,—

"I think we had better go, Geraldine. We will come again to look at the picture, Walter. And by the way, Walter, can't you visit me this evening?"

Walter shook his head.

"Don't give way so, my poor boy!" whispered her ladyship. "This will make no difference with Geraldine, I assure you."

"Dear Lady Rosbury, you did not hear her say what I did!" returned Walter. "But, perhaps, it is best so! I had begun to cherish a foolish dream!"

He wrung her ladyship's hand, and she replied,—

"I must see you soon, my dear boy. Come up to-morrow!"

She turned away, and the Lady Geraldine, who had by this time fully comprehended the scene, approached Walter, shook hands with him, and gave him a cordial invitation to call upon her.

There was a tone of pity in her voice, and her manner was more than ever friendly.

"Don't be in hurry, fren'," expostulated Lorraine. "Don't mean drive you off. Jes' came in see Walter minute. Like be sociable. Like get 'quainted with Walter's wife as is to be, my daughter! Needn't frown so, Walter! I shan't budge inch! If don't want me here, know where company 'll be 'ceptable! By way, la'ship," he added, suddenly, "how's Raymon'—my lad, you know? Is his ladship well?"

Lady Rosbury bowed, bestowed a tender, maternal smile upon Walter, and led the way from the apartment, followed by the Lady Geraldine.

Walter sank upon a couch overwhelmed with grief.

The maiden's words had given him hope and encouragement, and he had been about to offer her the heart she had won, and beg her to become his wife.

"How she must despise me now!" he thought. "With what justifiable anger she must regard my presumption!"

A pang shot through his heart, keener than any he had ever felt—a pang to which his late grief had been the wildest joy.

"Don't feel grieved, Walter!" exclaimed Lorraine. "Call her back, if say so!"

The youth turned away his head, and his features moved convulsively with his emotions. He murmured,—

"Lost—for ever lost! An unbridgeable gulf now rolls between the Lady Geraldine and me!"

CHAPTER XII.

My grief lies all within,
And these external manners of laments
Are merely shadows to the unseen grief,
That swells with silence to the tortured soul.
—Richard III.

For some moments Walter remained overwhelmed with despair at the sudden blasting of the hopes he had conceived, and entirely forgetful that the cause of his anguish had not departed. He was at length aroused to a consciousness of the fact by a dolorous sigh from Lorraine—a sigh so deep that it seemed to come from the profoundest depths of his being.

Looking up, Walter beheld his visitor still standing near him, and regarding him with a tearful but benignant visage.

"Don't cry, Walter," said Lorraine, soothingly. "May be she'll come back again. If don't, let her go! Women great trouble, Walter, You're well rid of her. What want of wife? Live jolly bachelor 'xistence like I do."

The young artist struggled to repress his grief, as something too sacred for any eyes to behold, and he soon managed to say, calmly,—

"Sit down, father. I have much to say to you!"

"Don't scold me, Walter!" cried Lorraine, entreatingly. "Don't be cross to poor old father! Didn't mean do nothin'. You won't be ha'eb, Walter?"

"I am not going to scold you, father," replied Walter, with a gentleness that might have resulted from utter weariness and hopelessness. "I shall not be harsh with you."

"An' you won't be mad at me, Walter?"

"No, I shall not be angry with you," responded the artist. "Perhaps, he added, sadly, "I ought to thank you for coming when you did—you probably having saved me from the humiliation of a refusal. At any rate, you, aroused me to a timely

recollection of the difference between our ranks of life!"

"You're real good not get mad, Walter, exclaimed Lorraine, tearfully, as he extended his hand. "Think good deal of you—as much as if's my own father! Do really! Never'll forget kindness, Walter, if live thousand years. Received me with open arms, when 'turned Australia—never flung second wife in my face—and, now treat me like a brother!"

Overcome by his emotions, Lorraine sank into a chair, and sobbed aloud.

Although he was under the influence of liquor, it was easy to see that the man was not utterly bad, indeed that he was really good-hearted, although he had many terrible faults, not the least of which was his utter lack of principle.

It was this very good-heartedness that had ruined him—he having never been able to resist a temptation, or deny a friend who presented one.

"Calm yourself, father," said Walter, kindly. "I wish to talk to you about—about mother!"

"That's right, Walter. Came on purpose to hear what old woman had to say. Concluded time you had answer to letter—telling I was 'live. Old lady mad on 'count of second wife, Walter? Might kept that yourself!"

Walter hesitated a moment, desiring to break the news of Mrs. Lorraine's death as gently as possible, and he finally said,—

"You had hardly left me the other day when I received a telegram from Martha Williams, our old neighbour, stating that mother was very ill. I started homewards at once, but on my arrival at Rosbury found that she had just died!"

"Dead!" repeated Lorraine, somewhat sobered by the intelligence. "Old woman dead! Possible? Was she ill long?"

"Only three or four days."

Lorraine was thoughtful a moment, and then he said, anxiously,—

"Was she d'ficient, Walter?"

"No. She retained her consciousness to the last."

"Who—who was with her when she died?"

"Lord Rosbury!"

"Lord Rosbury! Possible? Can it be—?" Lorraine suddenly checked himself, and glanced at Walter. "How came his ladyship to be with her? Looks odd! What he want with her?"

"When the physician told mother that her hours were numbered," replied Walter, "she became very much agitated, and declared that she must see Lady Rosbury, or Lord Rosbury, or me, without delay. Martha Williams telegraphed to me, but it became evident that mother could not live until I should arrive. She then sent for Lady Rosbury and her son, imploring them not to deny her last request, as she had a communication of great importance to make to them."

"Communication?" faltered Lorraine, his face blanching, and his manner becoming nervous and uneasy. "What did la'ship do?"

"Her ladyship was absent on a visit, and word could not have been got to her in time. Lord Rosbury, however, was kind enough to go to mother, and he was with her when she died!"

"Anyone else present?" questioned Lorraine, anxiously.

"No one but Lord Rosbury!"

"How long did she live after he went to see her?"

"Over an hour, Martha Williams said."

"Then—then she made the communication?"

"Oh, yes."

Lorraine became paler, and he bent forward, with a keen, scrutinising glance at Walter.

"Have you any—any idea of what the communication was?" he asked.

"Certainly," responded Walter, with con-

siderable surprise at Lorraine's strange manner.

"You have?" cried Lorraine, springing from his chair.

"Of course. Lord Rosenbury was still at the cottage when I arrived, and he told me all my mother wanted of him!"

"Indeed!" exclaimed Lorraine, in an incredulous tone. "What was the communication?"

"It was simply to commend me to Lady Rosenbury and her son. My poor mother fancied that Lord Rosenbury's friendship might be of use to me in my career!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Lorraine, in a tone expressive of great relief. "He's a deep one—is Lord Rosenbury! I mean that he'll be a good friend to you, Wal'er. So, he told you all about it, did he?"

"Oh, yes. And he kept his promise well, endeavouring to comfort me and console me under my great sorrow! I know I ought to feel grateful towards him for his great kindness to me, and yet I can't help thinking it singular that he should so suddenly take such extraordinary interest in me!"

"How extraordinary?"

"Why, he wanted me to become intimate with him; and after the funeral, yesterday, he came to me and seemed to want to get me out of the country. At least, it seemed so to me. He tried to induce me to travel, to live in Paris, to go to Egypt and Palestine to paint pictures, and offered me a thousand pounds a year if I would go!"

"Course you 'cepted?"

"No, I refused. I have money enough, father, and I like my country too well to leave it. Besides, I can sell all the pictures I can paint, without going to the East for subjects!"

Lorraine looked thoughtful and troubled.

He looked at Walter furtively from under his brows, as if he would read the very thoughts of the young artist.

"I see nothin' extraordinary in his offers," he said, after a pause. "He feels kindly towards you, Wal'er, 'cause your mother was his nurse. Natural 'nough. You're foolish you don't go!"

Walter shook his head.

"Well, well, take your own way, Wal'er! I've 'vised you. Do as like. Nothin' to me. Is my lad in Lunnnon now?"

"Yes, he returned when I did yesterday. He remained at Rosenbury to attend to mother's funeral, a kindness which I feel deeply!"

A strange expression flitted over Lorraine's face at this remark.

Walter was silent a few moments, during which his visitor regarded him narrowly, and then he said,—

"You don't seem so shocked, father, as I had expected you would be, on hearing of mother's death!"

"Oh, I'm man the world, Wal'er—man the world! No use bein' sentimental, or makin' fuss. If loved the old woman, should stick to her! Shouldn't married 'gin! Too old for makin' fuss over her! S'pose she left a little sun'thin', eh!"

Walter restrained the disgust he felt at this question, and the worldly-mindedness of which it was the expression, and answered,—

"Yes, she had a few things to leave. I will tell you what disposition I have made of them. The cottage was well furnished—nearly as well as these chambers, and at my expense. I therefore had the furniture boxed up and stored in a neighbour's house!"

"Very well. S'pose you had a right to, since you gave the things to her!" remarked Lorraine, discontentedly. "And her clothes?"

"Those I presented to the same neighbour, Martha Williams. She had been my mother's untiring and faithful nurse in her illness, and her nearest friend always. It was therefore fitting that they should go to her?"

"But the chiney, Wal'er, as Lady Rosenbury gave her, and the silver spoons as her la'ship also presented her?"

"Those I shall keep!" returned Walter. "They are of little value pecuniarily, but to me of great importance, on account of the associations connected with them."

"And there ain't nothin' for me, Wal'er?"

"Yes, father," said Walter, going to his desk. "My mother, during her life, saved every penny she could for me. But Lord Rosenbury, having so kindly cared for me, I had no longer need of her savings. She declared on her death-bed that she believed you to be alive, and that you would sometime return to England. In such an event, she desired her money to go to you. Here it is!"

He drew a bag containing the savings of the late Mrs. Lorraine from his desk, and handed it to his visitor.

Lorraine took it with some emotion.

"Who'd given the old lady credit for a' much 's'gativity?" he observed, plunging his hand into the bag. "I didn't 'serve her, Wal'er. She was too good for me. How much money think there is here?"

"About three hundred pounds."

"Possible? Where could the old lady get so much? She must ha' scrimped herself a good deal. What 'fustionate creetur's women are! 'Minds me what post says bout 'em—how woman 'll stick closer to you than—than—that's it, ain't it? You get the meanin'?"

Having assured himself that Walter was not mistaken in the amount contained in the bag, Lorraine laid his treasure on his knees, and wept.

"I never 'served her, Wal'er," he sobbed. "Realise now what brute I was! Wish I'd done different! Broke her heart—know I did! Give anything if she'd forgiven me!"

"She did forgive you—I know she did!" said Walter, touched at Lorraine's distress. "She mourned deeply and sincerely over your supposed death, and she forgot all your faults!"

"Poor thing! Wish could have seen her 'fore she died! If ever marry 'gain, 'll treat wife better!"

With this resolution Lorraine wiped his eyes, and regained his composure.

"Taint everybody, Wal'er," he resumed, after a pause, "as would be so honor'ble as you. 'Most men would a kept this ere money. But you're obip old block, Wal'er. Honour runs in your blood—I mean—that is—your mother was a good woman, Wal'er, if I ain't! Yes, if I ain't! Don't think I shall forget your kindness, Wal'er! Colte Lorraine ain't the f'l'a to do that! Never forget a kindness or an injury—never! Remember that!"

His tone showed that he was in earnest.

In fact, Colte Lorraine had been distinguished in his youth and early manhood—until his departure for Australia—for an Indian-like devotion to those who served him, and an Indian-like hatred towards those who injured him. The latter characteristic had often brought him into serious difficulties, which the law had been called upon to settle.

"You must have considerable money now?" said the artist. "With what I gave you the other day, and with this legacy, you might get into a little business, and gain a comfortable income!"

"Yes, but I haven't got what you gave me th' other day, Wal'er. It's 'bout gone!"

"About gone? Have you lost any of it?"

"Not exactly," replied Lorraine. "But, livin's 'spensive—things cost, Wal'er."

"Very true, but how could you use so much money in so short a time?"

"This the way of it," answered Lorraine, somewhat reluctantly. "Went to a tavern, an' gave out I was 'turned Australian. All took for granted I was rich. Thought I was 'centric, on account of clothes. Then showed money you gave me, an' somehow everybody wanted to be treated, and bills were bigger 'n ought to be, an' 'servants hung 'bout for money, an' finally a f'l'a took me gamblin' house, an' there lost 'bout all! Had good drinks there, though!"

Walter comprehended the case. After a moment's thought he said,—

"You had better change your residence, and the sooner the better. How would you like me to set you up in a neat little business?"

"No. No need work," responded Lorraine, with a grand air. "Can live without work. Don't like be tied to shop. Prefer walk 'bout. Like be man 'bout town, you know!"

"But you cannot be that," said the artist, kindly but firmly. "It is true that I have a very good income, of which I do not use the whole. It is true also that I get good prices for my pictures, which cost me months of labour. But how often can I give you fifty pounds at once without feeling its loss? You therefore have need of economy, or to do something for your own support. Of course, while I live I will care for you—"

"Thank you, Wal'er," interrupted Lorraine, extending his hand. "Shan't forget kindness to me. But I have private means—sun'thin' fall back on—sort o' private bank, you know, where can get lots money for askin'. Shan't take any more from you. 'Twouldn't be fair. Know somebody's got a better right sport me than you have!"

"I don't understand you!" said the artist, quite puzzled.

"All right. Don't want you to?" responded Lorraine, mysteriously. "But really couldn't take shop, you know."

Walter dismissed Lorraine's words as idle boasting, and remarked,—

"You will, of course, allow me to recommend to you apartments better suited to your means than your present hotel? When I first came to London I lodged in Kensington at a very neat house, where you will feel perfectly at home, and not be in any danger of being cheated!"

"Jes' suit me, Wal'er!"

"Then I'll give you the address and a letter to the person who keeps the house. I know her rooms are vacant, and it will not be necessary for me to go with you!"

He wrote the promised note, and gave it to his visitor, who was profuse in the expression of his thanks.

Walter then gave him a little good advice, and Lorraine soon after arose, saying,—

"Must go, Wal'er—'ll probably be in see you 'fore long. Come in the evenin' when don't hav' comp'ny. Sure you ain't mad me, Wal'er, on 'count of girl?"

Walter nodded.

"Shan't forget kin'ness, Wal'er, as said 'fore. Good-bye. Good bye, my son!"

He extended his hand again, then gathered up his bag of money, securing it on his person, and took his departure with many expressions of affection.

When he had gone, the artist flung himself back on the lounge on which he had been sitting and covered his face with his hands.

Although he had been so patient with Lorraine, so kind and gentle to him, he could of course neither love nor respect him as a father.

"It is hard to call that man father!" he thought, with a pang of anguish. "I could almost wish he had really died in Australia! Then, perhaps the Lady Geraldine had not scorned me, as she now does! Oat this is terrible! It seems as though my heart would burst with its emotions!"

He arose and paced to and fro, his pale, set countenance looking ghastly by contrast with his gay cap and gown.

"My picture is finished," he said, at length, "and I am free. I have nothing to detain me in London. I will go somewhere and hide until I have conquered my grief, or until I can conceal it skillfully. Perhaps the seacoast would be best for me, where I can work at a marine picture, and have for champion the screaming sea-gulls and the moaning waves. Yes, I will go to-morrow! I will write a note to Lady Rosenbury, explaining the scene of to-day, but I cannot see even her!"

He went to his desk, busying himself with a letter to her ladyship, and, when he had finished it, he touched a bell near him,

Parkin immediately made his appearance, "You are to post this letter, Parkin," said the artist, indicating it. "I wish you also to purchase a little tent and the necessary appurtenances, as we start to-morrow morning for the sea-coast, where I shall begin a picture. As soon as you have made the necessary purchases, you are to pack up paints, brushes, clothes, everything we shall need!"

"Yes sir," said Parkin, betraying no astonishment, his master having made one or two such trips before. "Shall I purchase some provisions, sir?"

"As you like, Parkin—anything you want," replied his young master, wearily. "You need not trouble me with anything!"

He handed his valet a handful of gold, and departed, greatly pleased at the proposed change of scene.

The strange pallor, that had momentarily fled from the artist's face, then returned, and he resumed his reclining position and endeavoured to school his tortured soul into calmness and fortitude.

But the effort cost him a pang almost like that which parts the soul from the body!

CHAPTER XIII.

Smooth runs the water, where the brook is deep
And in his simple shew he harbours treason.
—Shakespeare.

HOURS passed, and when his valet returned from fulfilling all his commissions, Walter still lay upon his lounge with shaded brows. Parkin, believing his young master to be affected with a headache, moved about with noiseless step, drawing the curtain to the sky-light and closing the blinds to the front window, so that the studio was bathed in a dim twilight. He then retired to the ante-room, drew from a small cupboard a spirit lamp and a tiny copper tea-kettle, and proceeded to prepare a cup of tea. An invalid caddy supplied the principal ingredient, and he soon filled a large porcelain cup with the fragrant beverage, which he carried to the artist.

"Go away Parkin," said Walter wearily. "I don't want to be disturbed!"

"But sir," pleaded the faithful fellow, who was devotedly attached to his master, "you won't be able to go to-morrow, if you don't do something for your headache. Please drink this tea, sir!"

Walter yielded to his valet's importunities, and drank the contents of the cup.

"Thank you, Parkin," he then said. "Have you made all the preparations for our journey?"

"I have made all the purchases, sir, but I haven't done my packing yet."

"That you can do this evening. Ah! it is getting late." You may light up, Parkin!

The valet removed the cup, and hastened to light the gas-jets, placing shades over them that the glare might not annoy his young master, and then he quietly retreated to the ante-chamber.

Walter had relapsed into his previous quietude when he was disturbed by the entrance of Lord Rosenbury.

"Excuse me, Walter, for my intrusion," said his visitor, coming forward. "Your valet tried to keep me out—told me you had a headache, and could see no one—but I assured him that I was your best friend, and entered despite his remonstrances. Are you ill?"

"Oh, no," replied Walter, rising. "I have a headache, but I am in no need of a physician. Be seated, my lord."

"I'll just take a look at your pictures first," Walter, responded Rosenbury. "Lie down again, and don't stand on ceremony with me!"

Walter resumed his seat, and his visitor proceeded to make a tour of the studio, expressing the utmost admiration for the works of the artist.

(To be continued.)

A BEAUTIFUL CLAIMANT.

CHAPTER XV.

IT was a strange thing that Vere Thornton, who usually enjoyed the best of spirits, should have been troubled by gloomy thoughts on almost the whole of his homeward voyage, the more so as he had no cause for despondency, and, being an excellent sailor, thoroughly enjoyed the passage across the ocean.

Vere was one of those pleasant-spoken young men who make friends everywhere, and he won golden opinions among his fellow-passengers. But though he was always ready to join in any amusement that was going on—though the Captain told him he was the life of the party—the strange fact remained that as soon as he had retired to his cabin for the night his spirits began to flag, and he was seized upon by the most unaccountable depression. He who in general slept like a top, had bad nights and troubled dreams.

He rarely passed a single night without a vision of home, and in each one he had the dim consciousness that trouble had fallen on his family, though it never took precisely the same form. Sometimes it would be his mother's face he saw, pale and cold, as though the features were calm in death. At others he would hear Kathleen's voice imploring his aid, or else the figure of his father on the very brink of a precipice, from which it seemed nothing could save him. The dreams took divers forms, but all were of the Sycamores, and each boded trouble.

"You look like a ghost!" said the ship's doctor, a very agreeable young officer, happening to meet Vere on deck before breakfast one morning, and noticing how wan and heavy his face was. "What ails you, Mr. Thornton? You look as though you had seen a ghost."

"I believe I have."

Dr. Smart stared.

"Come in here," he said, cheerfully, as they passed the door of his cabin, "and tell me all about it. You are the first person who ever asserted the good ship *Persian* was haunted."

They were within a few hours of Madeira, and had left Cape Town over a fortnight, quite long enough for the two young men. The doctor was about Vere's own age—to become intimate; and there was real concern in Henry Smart's face as he felt Mr. Thornton's pulse.

"Why, you have worked yourself up into a frenzy! What on earth do you fancy you saw? It must have been something dreadful to move you so."

"It was bad enough! Look here, Smart, I suppose I can trust you? I don't want to be made the laughing-stock of the passengers, as I should be if they heard this."

"The passengers will hear nothing from me," returned the young doctor, promptly.

"Now, what is it? I have noticed once or twice you looked depressed of a morning, but never so bad as this."

"I told you I had seen a ghost. I ought to have said I had had a bad dream."

"No one believes in bad dreams nowadays, nor in good ones either!"

"No! How many nights have we been at sea, doctor?"

"Last night was the fifteenth. It was a fortnight yesterday since we left Cape Town."

"Ah, and what would you say if I told you that every one of those fifteen nights I had had the 'bad dreams' you think so lightly of."

"I should say you had indigestion."

"You have seen a good deal of me, Smart. Should you call me a nervous man? Am I a fanciful, imaginative creature?"

"You have splendid nerves!" admitted Dr. Smart, "but really, you know, instead of your dream repeating itself it may be a mere

effort of memory, and the vision have appeared but once."

"I never said the dream repeated itself! Every night I dream of my home, and that there is trouble there. Until last night I never knew the form that trouble would take. Sometimes I saw one, sometimes another of my family. There was always sorrow on their faces, but I never guessed its nature until now."

"And now?"

Vere's face was pale as marble; and, strong man as he was, he shivered.

"I saw my mother lying murdered in a lonely part of my father's grounds. I saw a man lean over her and stab her in the breast. His face was turned away from me. He was a tall, thin man in a grey overcoat."

"No wonder you are unnerved. Yet, rest assured, it is only an ugly vision. Who would be likely to murder Mrs. Thornton?"

"No one. She had not an enemy in the world," replied Vere, promptly; "but, Smart, why should I dream continually of home and trouble happening there without cause?"

"You did not leave anyone in ill-health when you said good-bye? You have not had any bad news since you came out?"

"They were all quite well when I left England in January. I had a letter from my sister, urging me to return quickly, because she had taken a great dislike to one of my father's guests; and my return home would probably be the signal for the young lady's departure, but that is hardly bad news."

Dr. Smart could make nothing of it. He said he would give Vere a composing draught before he went to bed, and that, as they should be at Madeira by noon, very likely some letters there might relieve his anxiety.

Mrs. Thornton and Kathleen had not felt sure Vere would be able to catch that particular steamer; but they had both written to Madeira on the chances of it; and besides, their letters the young man found a short note from the Vicar.

Vere felt amazed. Dr. Bolton so seldom troubled himself about anything beyond his parish. Perhaps it was the fear he had written to break bad news which made the young man open the clergyman's letter first of all.

It was about a week old, and had evidently been written under strong irritation. The Vicar said briefly Squire Thornton was perfectly infatuated with the young lady who claimed to be Marguerite Bovington; but that as co-trustee he himself very much distrusted her identity. And he urged Vere, in the interests of the true heiress, not to acknowledge his father's guest as the girl he had met in Africa unless he was quite convinced of her identity.

"It is strange," concluded Dr. Bolton, "that your mother and Kathleen both distrust her. They are too just to do so without strong cause. I am convinced the moment you return the Squire will try to win you over to his opinion. Considering the enormous wealth at stake, I warn you to be careful."

That was all; and, with a sigh of relief, Vere turned to the other letters. Kitty's, as he quite expected, was a tirade against the "claimant," as she chose to style Marguerite Bovington; but his mother's puzzled him. Rarely did Mrs. Thornton assert her will in contradiction to her husband's. Rarely, indeed, did she interfere with any cherished scheme of his; but now, in a few touching lines, she told her son that his father had taken a strong desire to see him married to Miss Bovington, and so unite the two estates, but that, if he did, it would be to his mother a cruel grief.

"I say nothing of this young lady's claims," wrote gentle Lucy Thornton. "She may be the rightful heiress, but I am certain she is not a good woman. There is a secret in her life, and, I fear, a dark one. I think it would be the bitterest grief I have ever known if I had to receive her as your wife."

Vere put the letters away, and sat down on

a deserted part of the deck. The passengers were some of them at anchor, some had already started to enjoy the delights of the beautiful island. Crowds of Portuguese had come off to the ship with embroidered muslin, basket-work, rings, and all the other trifles for which Madeira is famous; but Vere wandered far from the little crowd of purchasers, and sat down alone to ponder over his mother's letter.

He was young and thoughtless. He had his father's excitable temper; but there was one strange gift which everyone acknowledged he had inherited from neither of his parents. He was a wonderful judge of character. He was prone to take likes and dislikes to people after seeing them once or twice, and his judgment had never yet been mistaken. Again and again at school and college he had proved right. Those he thought trustworthy became his loyal, faithful friends; those he doubted turned out black sheep indeed. The gift had been his even from childhood, when he conceived a violent dislike to a nurse who came to the Sycamores with the most satisfactory references. The references proved forged, and she decamped, after a few days, with all the portable property she could lay her hands on.

Looking at the matter all round Vere came to one firm conclusion. If the young lady who was making such a commotion at the Sycamores deserved his mother's disapproval, why, then, she was not the girl he had met in the moonlight at Beaufort. He had never forgotten the sweet, wistful face, the sad, musical voice. He would have staked his life that the owner of that face was loyal and true. Most probably his father had been taken in by some specious adventurer.

"Anyway, I shall soon know!" he decided, with a sigh of relief. "Next Tuesday we shall be at Southampton. I shall reach home the following day; and then, in five minutes I can solve the question."

It came on him with a disagreeable shock that if he pronounced a verdict against the claimant he exposed himself to the charge of mercenary motives, since, failing any heir of her cousin Walter, Rebecca Bovington had willed her property to himself; but his English common sense reassured him.

"I need not touch a shilling of the money. I saw a Marguerite Bovington in Africa, and she is the heiress. It is only fair to her that I should unmask anyone who was trying to pass for her. But oh! I wish someone else had the job of breaking the truth to my father, if, as I expect, he has been making a gigantic mistake."

Dr. Smart did not forget the composing draught. Under its influence Vere passed an excellent night; but he refused the next morning to admit all his previous bad ones had been caused just by lack of the sedative.

"I never had a bad night before in my life, and it can't be the sea, for I am a first-rate sailor. I have rather an awkward piece of business before me when I get home, Smart; and I fancy I must have been worrying over it till I got regularly dazed."

"Very likely," said Dr. Smart, gravely. "I have heard of such things before. Let me give you a piece of advice, Mr. Thornton. Try and take things quietly. You'll find it best!"

"Why?" demanded Vere, cheerfully. "Surely you don't mean to insinuate I've got heart disease?"

"Your heart is as right as mine; but you've a peculiarly delicate nervous organisation."

"You said yesterday I'd excellent nerves."

"So you have. You'd not turn a hair if you were in a railway accident, and I fancy you'd hold your own with a runaway horse; but the fact is, as I've said, you are frightfully excitable, and your nerves are highly strung. It's very likely if you had not made a clean breast of things to me, but gone on adding your brains over them in silence, you'd have been almost beside yourself before we landed."

"You are not complimentary, doctor. Do

you want to hint I'm a fit subject for Bedlam?"

"No," said Dr. Smart, gravely, "I don't; but if ever there was a man whom a sudden shock would send into a bad attack of brain fever it is you!"

"Which only shows how mistaken a doctor can be," said Vere, lightly. "Do you know I have never had a day's illness. Even my mother, who's as nervous over me as most mothers are over an only son, even she—Heaven bless her!—has never had one hour's anxiety over my health."

"I daresay not!"

"While anyone will tell you I'm the easiest-going fellow in the world, I don't think I'm heartless; but I can never remember pining over anything in my life."

The young doctor smiled.

"Because you have never had any cause," he said, quietly. "Believe me, Mr. Thornton, it's not the people who excite themselves over every trifle who have the deepest feeling. When once a quiet person, who has latent excitement in his nature, gets roused, it's then we look for a mischief."

"I don't feel obliged to you, Smart," replied Vere. "You seem to have taken up a very evil opinion of me. I assure you I am the quietest, most peaceable fellow in the world!"

"Gunpowder is pretty quiet until you put a match to it," returned the Doctor. "You take my advice, and avoid excitement as you would the plague."

The next three days were quiet and uneventful. Vere slept well, and was in the best of spirits.

Early on Monday morning the good ship reached Plymouth; but Mr. Thornton had too much lost sleep to make up for to be remarkably early riser. The first boat had come off from shore before he left his cabin.

Henry Smart, not being overpressed with business (a ship's doctor has a very easy time when she weighs anchor), had taken his letters and newspapers from the saloon table, where the steward was sorting the contents of the post-bag brought by the boat, and was reading them very much at his ease in his cabin.

The letters did not take long. The first glance he gave at the paper filled him with horror. It contained a long account of the "Bovington Tragedy."

Dr. Smart never read murders, and at first sight passed this over; but catching sight of a familiar name in the summary of news—Thornton—almost breathless he read the whole of the paragraph, which simply said the inquest on the late Mrs. Thornton was adjourned till Monday.

He turned from that to the long report in the body of the paper, and read enough to convince him that his friend's mother had been murdered on the very night of Vere's last evil dream, and that her body had been found exactly as it appeared to him in the vision—shot through the heart in a lonely part of her husband's grounds.

Almost stunned for a moment by surprise, the young doctor collected his wits and rushed down to the saloon.

Vere Thornton had not yet appeared, and only one letter was waiting for him, and that bore no black edge, and was addressed in a clear, round hand.

"His father's lawyer, I suppose," thought Dr. Smart. "Well, I had better break the news to him before he reads it; but I don't think I ever had a shock I hated more."

As he was turning to leave the saloon a stranger came up and accosted him. Several persons had come off from shore in the boat, so there was nothing surprising in this; but Dr. Smart, though not a fanciful man, felt as though there was something peculiarly repulsive to him in the voice and manner of the new-comer.

He was a man apparently of middle age, and wore a heavy black beard and moustache. His complexion was dark, and his eyes had a restless shiftness, as though they could not look long in one direction.

"I beg your pardon, sir. Is Mr. Thornton on board?"

"Yes. He is still in his cabin."

"Perhaps I can go to him there. I have come to meet the ship at his father's urgent request to break some bad news to him."

A moment before Dr. Smart had been positively hating the task of telling Vere his mother was dead. Now he actually found himself wishing he could take it out of this stranger's hand. He seemed to feel he would irritate poor Vere, and deal out his evil tidings in drops like poison.

"Are you acquainted with Mr. Vere Thornton?"

"Never saw him in my life. I am the detective employed by the Squire in this lamentable affair."

"Then don't you think that I, as one tolerably intimate with the poor fellow, could break the news better than a perfect stranger?"

"No, sir, I don't," retorted the other, coldly. "The Squire's injunctions were peremptory. I was to tell his son what had occurred, and bring him home at once."

Dr. Smart opened his eyes.

"Vere Thornton will not require any escort. He is not a boy, but a man some way past twenty, and quite capable of managing his own affairs."

"The Squire said I was to keep an eye on him," said Mr. Taylor, gravely. "After the calamities in his family in the last week, it's only natural he should be anxious."

"Do you mean there is any fresh trouble besides the murder?"

"There was no murder!" said the detective, sharply. "Mrs. Thornton committed suicide during a fit of temporary insanity, and four-and-twenty hours later her daughter ran away from home. The poor girl inherited her mother's curse!"

He went towards one of the stewards as he spoke, asking him to take a message to Mr. Thornton. Three minutes later Vere appeared, and led the way back to his cabin.

Dr. Smart would have liked to make a third at the interview. He did linger close to the cabin door—not with any mean wish to play the part of eavesdropper; but because he honestly feared Vere would soon stand in need of his help.

Apparently the young man bore the terrible disclosure better than he had expected, for the doctor heard no call for help. Mr. Taylor emerged presently, quite satisfied apparently, with the results of the interview. He went straight on deck to await his companion.

Dr. Smart, still waiting at his post, saw Vere presently come out pale, listless, and with a strange, dazed look upon his face, as though he had not yet realised the bitter truth.

"You see I was right," he said, simply, as he took the young doctor's hand. "Those dreams meant something!"

"My poor fellow! I will never laugh at a dream again. I suppose you will leave the ship, here, and not go on with us to Southampton?"

"Ay. I must go home at once."

"Who is that man?" asked Dr. Smart, with more goodwill than curiosity. "I don't fancy him!"

"I believe he's a detective. He seems to think if I can get to Bovington before the inquest is over my evidence may stop their giving that ornate verdict. You see, Smart, I saw it done. I told you so."

Dr. Smart felt a thrill of pity. He knew and liked Vere Thornton. He had a strong aversion for the detective; but the officer employed by Squire Thornton was probably right as to his facts.

If Mrs. Thornton had been insane, and had, while temporarily out of her mind, taken her life, would not any jury, who listened to Vere's story, instead of believing him, say simply that he had inherited his mother's mania?

"You are not fit for such excitement," he said, soothingly. "If you rush up to the north at once you will be worn out before you arrive there."

"I must go!" said Vere doggedly. "It is my only chance."

And Henry Smart, feeling all remonstrances were useless, said no more; only as he saw his friend follow Mr. Taylor into the boat waiting to convey them to the land, he wished with all his heart he had been free to leave the good ship *Persian*, and travel northwards with poor Vere.

Not till he returned to the saloon did he remember the letter awaiting Mr. Thornton. It was still lying unopened on the table.

The young doctor little guessed that, if only poor Vere had read that letter before his interview with the detective, Mr. Taylor would have left the ship without his companion.

CHAPTER XVI.

KENNETH MARTIN heard of Mrs. Thornton's death, and a great sympathy filled his heart for the bereaved family.

He had been such a frequent visitor at The Sycamores that he knew how sorely the gentle mistress of the pleasant home would be missed; and his first act after reading the newspaper paper account was to write two letters—one to the Squire, the other to his daughter, in both of which he tried to express a little of the regret he so truly felt.

No answer came to either; but at this Kenneth was not surprised. How could they find time to write when they were so occupied by sad cares?

He was not at all astonished at their silence; but he did feel a great deal of amazement, when, two days after hearing of the calamity, Claude Maitland entered his chambers with an expression of such utter misery upon his handsome face that Kenneth thought surely some further trouble had befallen the Thorntons.

The young lawyer and Thornton had often met. They had, indeed, a cordial mutual liking, though Vere Thornton was the connecting link between them.

Vere was the dear friend of both. Claude having become his intimate, chiefly through living in the same neighbourhood, and being consequently thrown in his way, while Kenneth was his chosen comrade at school and college.

"Sit down," cried Kenneth, warmly shaking hands with Mr. Maitland, and forcing him into his own easy chair. "You are the last person I expected to see!"

Claude sank back in the chair as though he were physically exhausted.

Kenneth guessed he had been travelling all night, and gave an order to his clerk before he led the way into his private room. The result was the prompt appearance of a decanter of port wine and two glasses.

"Drink this, please," said Kenneth, pouring out a glass. "Do you know you look done up! We will have lunch presently, but you mustn't wait for that. Now," as he took back the empty glass, "tell me anything you like. I am still a briefless barrister, so we are not likely to be interrupted."

"Of course you've read of Mrs. Thornton's death?"

"Ay. I wrote to the Squire and his daughter on Thursday night. It was in all the evening papers. It will make an awful home-coming for poor Vere."

"Look here, Martin. You were with Vere on his last tour in Africa. You must have seen the Miss Bovington he met with at that outlandish gold mine?"

"I saw her," laconically. "I hear she has come into a large property in Yorkshire."

"She hasn't come into it yet. Martin. I believe Miss Bovington to be a cruel, heartless adventuress. She made Mrs. Thornton's life miserable, and now dares to suggest she committed suicide while insane."

"I know," said Kenneth, simply. "When I read the report in to-day's paper I felt furious. If ever I met a good, pure-hearted woman it

was Vere's mother. She takes her own life, indeed! I'd as soon believe she committed murder!"

"So would I. The slander drove Kathleen almost frantic with grief."

"And the Squire! Didn't he turn the girl out of his house?"

"The Squire sees everything, at present, with Miss Bovington's eyes. As you may have heard, I offended him, and he has not spoken to me for months; but everyone tells me the same tale, that he is perfectly infatuated with Marguerite Bovington! And now can you guess why I have come to you?"

"I think so. Miss Thornton is anxious the news should not reach her brother suddenly, and you want me to go out to Mafeking and meet him?"

"No. You were with Vere at Baasfontein. You saw the true Miss Bovington. I want you to come with me to Yorkshire, and decide the question whether this adventuress is the girl you saw. If once Squire Thornton learns her falseness we may get him to exert his own intellect. At present he sees everything with her eyes."

"He was always a very irritable man," said Kenneth Martin, thoughtfully, "and if he once took up a fancy nothing would convince him he was mistaken. Is he much the same now?"

"He is worse. Martin, you said just now you were a briefless barrister, but you know all the persons interested in this awful tragedy, and you would understand the intricacies of the case far better than a stranger. I want you to undertake it!"

"But, my dear fellow, what case? Until anyone is accused of Mrs. Thornton's murder, you don't need a barrister."

"I want you to come down with me and attend the inquest. It's adjourned till Monday. You might say you watched the case in the interests of your friend, Vere Thornton, if they challenged your right to be there."

"I will go, certainly; but, Maitland, I can do nothing you could not manage as well. You have far more experience as a lawyer than will ever come to my door as a barrister."

"I can't settle to anything," said Claude, wearily. "I doubt if I shall go back to Yorkshire. When I leave you, I am going to a detective's, and I must be guided by what he says."

"But, my good fellow, your place is at Bovington," said Kenneth, decidedly. "You are Miss Thornton's betrothed; and, poor girl, at such a time, you ought to be with her."

Claude looked bewildered.

"Didn't I tell you? Have you misunderstood me? Kathleen is lost! I have come up to London to look for her."

"Lost?"

He could only utter the one word, so amazed was he at the news.

"Just that," said Claude Maitland, wearily. "I thought I had told you. It was that brought me to London, but I could not bear to leave them to do as they liked at the inquest. I felt someone should be there, for Kitty's sake and Vere's, to defend their mother's memory from slander."

"I'll go down by the mail to-night; but Maitland, try and explain yourself. How can Miss Thornton be lost? When did it happen? Was it before or after her mother's death?"

"It was on Thursday. I wanted to see her, and I was forbidden The Sycamores. I felt I could comfort her better than anyone, and Dr. Bolton asked her to meet me at the Vicarage."

"And she consented?"

"She promised that she would come in the evening. Poor child! she told the Vicar she could not bear to be alone at The Sycamores during the hour of her mother's murder. Remember, it was only the night before that poor Mrs. Thornton had been brought home dead. Dr. Bolton had a long conversation with her, and she promised to meet me at his house that evening."

"Perhaps she was not a free agent. You

say the Squire disliked your engagement. He may have found out the appointment, and forbidden her to keep it."

"You know Jenkins, the Squire's butler?"

"Rather. He always reminds me of the old feudal days. His devotion to the Thorntons was so intense and faithful."

"Well, he let my darling out. He had wished to attend her himself to the Vicarage; but the Squire and Miss Bovington were dining at seven, and it was impossible for him to be spared. He declares the clock struck seven as he closed the door after Kitty."

"And she did not come to the Vicarage?"

"She never reached it. I waited there for her till midnight; then we came to the conclusion her father had prevented her from coming."

"And of course you were right?"

"Listen. The next morning Jenkins came down to the Vicarage in search of her. She had never been home all night!"

"It is a long way from The Sycamores to the Vicarage. I should think Miss Kathleen found her strength breaking down—remember all she had gone through—and took shelter with some of her friends. There is not a house in the place but where she would be welcomed."

"You don't understand. The lodge-keepers both declare she never passed through the gates. Martin, it makes me almost distracted. Again and again I ask myself the question, where is she? Surely, oh! surely the wretches who killed her mother have not taken Kitty's life too!"

Kenneth Martin looked lost in thought.

"If anyone had asked me the question I should have said Mrs. Thornton and her daughter had not an enemy in the world. They seemed to me universally beloved."

"So they were. As to the idea of Mrs. Thornton committing suicide because one of her husband's pistols was found near the spot, the Squire himself admits the pistols had been lying on the table in his study for two days before the murder. Anyone might have got into the room and stolen them."

"I will go down by the mail-train to-night, Maitland," said Kenneth, gravely, "and I promise you I will do my utmost to defend Mrs. Thornton's memory; but I think you make a mistake by remaining in London. You ought to be on the spot."

"Why?"

"I suppose you think that Kathleen—I have known her from childhood, and loved her as a sister, so that it comes more natural to call her so—is kept away against her own will?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then depend upon it she is still in Yorkshire. I am not a detective, and I don't claim to equal their acuteness, but I feel convinced of one thing. Whoever has kidnapped Kathleen would not risk taking her to any railway station within ten miles of The Sycamores. She is too well known. I should say she is in her father's house!"

"But—"

"Listen! If Miss Bovington has anything to gain by making people believe Mrs. Thornton committed suicide, her first step would be to silence the protests of her daughter. By getting Kathleen into her power, and making her disappear in a strange way, she would gain two things. First, she would prevent the poor girl from giving evidence at the inquest. Then she would be making it seem, from the daughter's eccentricity, that it was not so impossible the mother had been insane!"

Claude opened his eyes.

"I do believe, Martin, you have hit on it. You are better than any detective; but how in the world did you see through that fiend's schemes so well?"

"Not from any legal skill, I fear," confessed Kenneth. "But you know I am a story-writer, and in my profession one has to study character. If a woman is out and out bad, I have discovered there is no length to which she will not go; and from your de-



["WHAT AILS YOU, MR. THORNTON?" ASKED THE SHIP'S DOCTOR. "YOU LOOK AS IF YOU HAD SEEN A GHOST!"]

scription I take it that Marguerite Bovington is bad to the core."

"I felt sure they would take Kitty away, because everyone round her home loves her."

"I should say she was at The Sycamores, or within a stone's throw of it. As to the lodge keepers, their story may be true enough; the railings are quite low enough for anyone to leap over in many parts. She may have grown frightened at the darkness, and attempted a short cut, instead of passing either of the lodges."

"You have put fresh courage into me," said Claude warmly. "I shall go back to-night; but, Martin, you must come with me!"

"I'll come. There's only one thing against it, Maitland. If you and I are down in Yorkshire, who is to break the awful news to Vere?"

"The Vicar has promised to see to that. He has written to the shipping company; and as soon as they receive the list of passengers telegraphed from Plymouth, they will wire to him if Vere is on board, and then he will start at once for Southampton. I have already written to the ship at Plymouth, telling Vere the bare facts, and that Dr. Bolton will meet him at Southampton. We thought it better to write to Plymouth lest he should get hold of any of the cruel rumours the Squire has suffered to be about."

"I remember the Vicar. He is the last man I should have fancied troubling himself to rush off to Southampton."

"You mustn't judge Dr. Bolton by his manner. Underneath his indifference he has a heart of gold. I tell you, Martin, I don't think I could have lived through yesterday but for his kindness and sympathy."

"And Vere knows him?"

"Vere has known him all his life. I don't think you or I could break things to him more carefully than the Vicar."

"I conclude Dr. Bolton shares your views of Miss Bovington?"

"Yes! I suppose you are sure of being able to identify her, if she is the person she claims to be?"

"I am positive."

"You know there are such things as disguises, and she is a very clever woman. Then you only saw the real Marguerite once?"

"Ay; but her face made an impression on me which I never forgot. Six or seven weeks ago, Maitland, I met in London a young lady who reminded me so strongly of Miss Bovington that I felt conscious, for the first time, how vividly and distinctly I remembered that brief meeting."

"Who is the young lady?" asked Claude, eagerly. "What a pity you did not speak to her? It might have been the real heiress!"

"I have spoken to her. It was at her father's house I met her. I have been there several times since, and the resemblance still strikes me; but as Miss Netherton has never been out of England, and has no relations in Africa, I know it is only one of those chance likenesses one meets from time to time."

"Did you ask her?"

"To confess the truth, I did. Maitland, you may trust me to recall the features of Marguerite Bovington, since I tell you Miss Netherton might be her twin sister; and I have no dearer hope in life than someday to persuade this same Miss Netherton to be my wife. You will understand, old fellow, I shall give my best energies, my warmest efforts, to find your sweetheart since I have learned lately to know what love means, and so can guess a little of your suffering."

"Do you know I used to fancy you cared for Kitty?"

"So I did as Vere's sister. I never believed in the other sort of love. In fact, a few weeks ago, I was on the verge of proposing to a girl because she had literary tastes, and our joint incomes would have provided things comfort-

ably. Thank goodness, I found out my mistake in time, and learned that love is better than aught else."

The two men shook hands warmly. It was a silent assurance of mutual assistance in the coming storm which they felt sure awaited them at Bovington. Of the two Kenneth was the more hopeful. Claude's very heart ached with the uncertainty of Kathleen's fate.

Early on Monday morning Dr. Bolton received a telegram announcing that the good ship *Persian* had reached Plymouth, and Vere Thornton was among her passengers. The kind-hearted Vicar caught the next train for the south, hoping to arrive at Southampton before the steamer, and supply his poor young friend with fuller and more detailed information than it had been possible to put in Claude Maitland's letter.

(To be continued.)

We are to have "An Automatic Railway Library," which means a case of books fitted into railway carriages. The books will consist of short novels and stories by good writers, and any books likely to tempt the weary into putting the all-important coin "into the slot."

"FIRST FOOTING" is a Scotch custom of the New Year, which is happily unknown in England. As soon as the hour of midnight proclaims that the Old Year is dead, the head of each household, together with the adult males and females belonging thereto, set out, each armed with a bottle of whisky, to pay the first visit of the year to friends and neighbours. The amount of good luck which will attend visitors and visited during the ensuing twelve months is believed to depend on the amount of whisky consumed by these "first-footers" over the threshold, and, judging from the visible results of the national libations, the attendant or resultant good fortune should be great indeed.



[JOS SANDERS AND HIS PASSENGER WERE CERTAINLY CONTRASTS—BRENDA DALE WAS A LADY.]

NOVELETTE.]

THE VILLAGE MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

A THIRD-CLASS carriage of the afternoon train to Dring one scorching hot summer's day. We say the afternoon train advisedly, since only three reached Dring from London daily—one at nine A.M., another ten hours later, while the last was exactly in the middle, and was always known in local conversation by the name now given.

Dring was a very small place, but as it was surrounded by several villages smaller still, which depended on it for railway station and shopping, it was wont to give itself airs.

Only one passenger alighted to-day—a girl in a soft brown cashmere dress and plain straw hat.

She was strikingly pretty and graceful, but she looked, somehow, as though she was not used to third-class travelling. Evidently she had won the hearts of her companions, for they all assisted in handing her her packages; and when the train steamed off she was left standing on the platform with two black bags, a bird cage, a bundle of shawls and umbrellas, and a good-sized basket which, from the suspicious sounds which came from its recesses, evidently contained something alive.

She was of middle height, and had the sweetest, truest grey eyes you might meet in a day's journey. For the rest, her features were regular and clearly-cut. Her soft brown hair was coiled round her head, leaving her broad forehead uncovered.

It was a pretty face and an intelligent one, but it did not look as though its owner were happy.

"Be those boxes yours, miss?" asked the porter of Dring, pointing to the two tin trunks which the guard had pitched out of his van.

"Yes, they are both mine; and I want to get on to Triggington, please. How far is it?"

"It's three miles, miss."

"Are there any cabs?"

"Dear me, no, miss! It's quite the country about here!"

"But still, people must get about," suggested Brenda, simply; "and no one could carry luggage three miles!"

"The quality keeps carriages," the porter condescended to explain, "and 'other folks borrow a cart. There's Jos Sanders goes to Triggington every day. He'd take all your traps up for sixpence, and you with 'em if you liked."

The cart was standing in the station-yard. It was clean and tidy. The driver, who came up to clinch the bargain, seemed respectable.

"You be the new schoolmistress, I reckon?"

"Yes; I am Miss Dale." There was a perceptible pause in the middle of her sentence.

"It's an uphill road to Triggington, with all sorts of turns. You'll very likely lose your way if you try to walk it, so I reckon you'd better come with me and your boxes; and we'll say ninepence for the lot."

Brenda agreed. Ninepence for herself and the canary, a small cat, two boxes and bags, besides sundry parcels, did not sound exorbitant terms. If everything in Triggington was on the scale of Jos Sanders' charges she began to think her salary would go a great deal farther than she had expected.

Jos and his passenger were certainly contrasts. He was just a simple country man, who cultivated vegetables in his patch of ground, and sold them in Dring on market day. His wife did "a little washing," and together they made a livelihood.

You could have told the man's calling wherever you had met him; but with Brenda it was very different. Though her brown cashmere was plain, almost to severity, it fitted her like a glove. The black velvet had

been fastened on her hat by tasteful fingers, and her small hands were encased in dark kid gloves.

Schoolmistresses have made great strides of late years, but few of them can boast the quiet grace and dignity which Miss Dale possessed, and which made Jos tell his wife later on he felt just as though "one of the quality" had taken a ride with him.

"Is Triggington a large place?" asked the new schoolmistress.

She knew so little of it, poor child, beyond the bare fact that there were seventy children of school age, and the village was too poor to afford an assistant. A furnished house and forty pounds a year were the emoluments offered, and there had been no keen competition for them. No one had been very anxious to dispute with Brenda her means of subsistence.

"Well," Jos shook his head, for he was not used to statistics, "there be bigger places, and there be smaller. It's big enough for we."

"Mr. Thorpe is the Vicar?"

She had touched a responsive chord at last.

"Ay, ay, miss, and a good man he is; and his wife was the kindest lady I'd ever wish to see. But since she died there hasn't been no one like to take hold of things in the parish, and they mostly 'slide."

The cart stopped at last before a building, which Brenda thought the prettiest village school she had ever seen.

It was built in the gothic style, and already the ivy clambered over the grey stone walls; at one side was a tiny cottage with a flower garden in front, and a row of geraniums on the window ledge.

A respectable woman came out to open the door, and lend a hand with the luggage.

Brenda felt a great shyness steal over her, but she contrived to smile as she gave Jos his ninepence and to ask, with some show of interest, whether any of his family were among her pupils.

"Two little girls, miss. And nice lasses they be, though I say it."

Brenda wished him "good day" and went into the little parlour; but the door was open, and she caught every word of the conversation which ensued between the woman who had received her and her late driver.

"Her have a pleasant face," said Jos, approvingly; "seems like children 'll take to her. I hope she'll stay."

"She'll not stay three months," replied the woman, positively. "I'll say that."

"Why, what's amiss with her? She talked as friendly as may be."

"There's naught amiss with her, but Miss Ada won't let her stay. She'll think her much too pretty."

Another moment and Mrs. Buxton was back in the parlour, as quietly respectful as though she had not just uttered such a sorry prophecy.

"You'll like a cup of tea, miss; it's all ready, and I'll fill the teapot from my own kettle. Mr. Thorpe told me to order it a few groceries, and see that things were comfortable. A kind-hearted gentleman he is as ever lived, but he's had some trouble lately. It's not a year ago since his wife died."

"Has he any daughters?" asked Brenda, wondering if the redoubtable "Miss Ada" lived at the Vicarage.

"He's three, Miss Dale; but, in my mind, not one of them comes up to their mamma, though they've all been born at Triggington, and grown up, as to say, among us."

Mrs. Buxton retreated to her own abode, and the new schoolmistress, after enjoying her tea, felt energy enough to explore her new home.

It was separated from the school only by a little strip of ground, over which some careful person had caused a glass awning to be built, so that the teacher could pass from her home to her work in the worst rain without getting wet.

A small parlour, a tiny kitchen, and a good-sized bedroom, running over the two, was the extent of Brenda's dominions.

The three rooms were furnished very plainly, but they looked pretty, because everything had been bought new, and was therefore adapted to the size of the rooms.

Brenda decided that when her piano and easy chair arrived the parlour would look quite homelike. Meanwhile she unpacked her boxes, taking out many a quaint little nick-nack and ornament which would serve to brighten her abode.

At last, after an hour's hard work, she felt tired, and sat down to enjoy the result of her labours; but she had hardly done so before a knock came at the door, and possessing no domestic to answer the summons, she was perforce obliged to go to open it herself.

A gentleman stood there. A man of forty, turned, tall and stately. He stared at Brenda with an astonishment which was too genuine to be rude.

"Are you Miss Dale?" he exclaimed "or has there been some mistake?"

"I am the new schoolmistress, sir!" returned the girl, quietly, adding the last word by an effort, for it did not come naturally to her lips.

"Oh! I am one of the school-managers, and I thought I would call and give you a few instructions."

Brenda bowed, and led the way to the little parlour.

Colonel Moore stared again. He remembered the room as it used to be, and noticed the alterations already made in it.

"I am afraid, Miss Dale, you have made a great mistake in coming here," he said, quickly. "We only require the three R's, and there is no scope for such accomplishments as you may possess."

She shook her head.

"I quite understood what was required, sir, and I hope to give satisfaction. I shall do my best to do so."

"Hem! You look very young!"

"I am twenty-two. I told my age to Mr. Thorpe before he engaged me."

Colonel Moore plunged into business conversation, and sat twenty minutes, talking hard.

He left Brenda with the impression that if dictatorial, he was, at least, just and sincere.

He was a bachelor, and a rich one. Small as was the population of Triggington there were two or three young ladies quite ready to become Mrs. Moore; but neither of them had ever caused the gallant officer so much curiosity as did the humble inhabitant of the school-house.

Geoffrey Moore knew a lady when he saw one, and ten minutes in Miss Dale's society had told him she was a gentlewoman by birth and education. What in the world had induced her to come and teach the Triggington rustic for forty pounds a year?

And within a week everyone was asking the same question. Her piano had arrived, much to the scandal of the Vicarage girls.

Everyone with the slightest right to inspect the new schoolmistress had called, as well as a great many who had none, and the result was a general commotion in Triggington.

What did this grave, beautiful girl want in the humble sphere she had chosen? Was it to hide herself, because she had committed some terrible crime? Was it because she had suddenly been left destitute, or—why was it?

Jos Sanders heard all the gossip with silent attention, but his own opinion, given at home, was a very shrewd one.

"She's had a lot of trouble, and just come here to be quiet; and if the cats 'ld let her alone she'd be content and never mind because she lived in a house no better than our'n. She only wants to be let be."

"And the children take to her wonderful, Jos," put in his wife. "She's always a kind word and smile for 'em. It ain't the poor folk that don't like Miss Dale; it's the ladies, because they think she's too much like themselves."

Mr. Thorpe was besieged on all sides. His three daughters after a month's separate complaints, which he never heeded, came to him together, and petitioned him to send away Miss Dale.

"It's really quite absurd," said Ada, who was seven-and-twenty. "She gives herself as many airs as though she were a lady."

"She spoils the children," chimed in Margaret, who believed in severity. "I don't suppose she ever uses the cane at all."

"I met her myself," declared Lucy, "stopping old Mrs. Drake's bath-chair, and talking to her just as though she was an equal!"

Mr. Thorpe gave one sigh for the loss of the kind-hearted wife who would have smoothed the grumblers. Then he said, coldly,—

"Miss Dale came to me highly recommended, and until she neglects her duties I have no intention of dismissing her. Indeed, I doubt if I could do so without the consent of the school-managers."

"If things were represented to them properly—" began Ada.

"Only there is nothing to represent. I have never seen the 'airs' of which Ada complains. It is one of my favourite theories that a good teacher never needs to use corporal punishment; and as old Mrs. Drake is the proudest woman in the parish I think we can trust her to check Miss Dale's advances if she dislikes them. You see, girls, your reasoning won't stand."

"I am sure she is not a proper person," said Ada, severely. "She looks theatrical, and no one knows anything about her."

"I know a great deal."

His daughters demanded with one voice,—

"What?"

"That she does her duty thoroughly, and is already beloved by the children. That is quite enough for me."

"You will never believe anything until it is too late. When she has robbed everyone in the place you will be sorry you neglected our advice."

"I'll risk it. Girls, I wish you would try and be a little more charitable."

"Where there is concealment there is always sin," said Ada, piously; "and you can't deny, papa, that Miss Dale's whole life is concealment. She never by any chance alludes to her past life. She never receives or writes a letter. You know no more about her than you did the day she came, more than a month ago!"

The Vicar was more impressed than he had let his girls perceive by their complaints; and when they had left the study he carefully unlocked one of his table drawers, and took from it a letter from an old college friend, who had a living the other side of England.

"I am more than willing to answer any questions you have asked about Brenda Dale," ran the letter. "She is the only daughter of a man I greatly respected. He was our village postmaster, and Brenda was brought up as a kind of little maid or humble companion to the young ladies at Monkton Court. When they went away with their mother, after Sir Lionel's death, they took Brenda Dale with them. Her father was just dead, and it seemed a suitable arrangement for her. I rather wonder she did not refer you to Lady Monkton instead of myself; but perhaps she fancied you would prefer a clerical reference. You say, truly, you cannot expect to get a trained mistress for forty pounds a year, and I consider you will do well to give Brenda Dale a trial. She has had an excellent plain education, is most conscientious and painstaking. She often assisted in our school, and seemed to have a natural gift for reading."

It was all in favour of the young schoolmistress; and Mr. Thorpe, after a month's experience, could fully endorse what his friend said of Miss Dale's painstaking, conscientiousness, and aptitude for her chosen work.

The Vicar could not doubt she was all her late pastor had said; and yet he had a kind of vague misgiving that there had come some great crisis in Brenda Dale's life between her leaving Elinmonkton and coming to Triggington.

"She looks to me as though she had gone through some terrible trouble," was his final reflection. "Well, poor girl, I'll not be the one to disturb her peace; but I wish, for her own sake, she would give me a little of her confidence so that I could silence the girls."

Perhaps it was with the hope of pleasing something that he made an unexpected call on Miss Dale that evening. He went after his late dinner, when he thought he should be sure to find her at home, and his alleged motive was to ask her a question about one of her pupils, who was ill.

Brenda was sitting in her little parlour writing a letter, so one complaint against her was groundless. She looked graver than usual, and the Vicar fancied he saw the trace of tears on her face.

He asked his question and lingered. What a pretty home she had made of the little school house, and how graceful she looked in her quiet brown dress!

"I hope you are comfortable here, Miss Dale?" he said, kindly. "It is a lonely life for a young girl like you, but I want you to try to feel at home amongst us."

"I am quite comfortable," said Brenda, slowly, "and I think Triggington one of the prettiest places I ever saw."

The Vicar persevered.

"You must get one of your friends to come and stay with you in the holidays," he suggested, "unless you are going home!"

"I have no home to go to," answered Brenda; "and there is no friend I could ask here, thank you all the same, Mr. Thorpe!"

"Are you really quite alone in the world, poor child?" exclaimed the kind old man.

"Quite alone!" Her voice shook as she said it.

"But surely, at Elinmonkton there must be friends who are dear to you?"

She turned on him with flashing eyes. For one moment she seemed changed from the

meek, gentle schoolmistress into a proud imperious beauty.

"I hate the very sound of Elinmonkton. I never want to see it or anyone connected with it again."

So the Vicar had to go away with his curiosity ungratified. He was not a romantic man, but he began to form a theory of his own respecting his mysterious protégée. Could Lady Monkton have a son, and had that young gentleman won the affections of his sister's hand-maiden, and then broke her heart by letting her know he did not intend to marry her?

The Vicar had plenty of London friends, and to one of these he wrote a pleasant, gossiping letter, concluding by an inquiry, added with an effort at indifference, whether they could tell him anything of the Monktons. He was much interested in the family, though personally unknown to them.

The answer which came in the course of a week quite shattered Mr. Thorpe's little romance. His friend knew Lady Monkton fairly intimately.

She was a charming woman, but had never recovered the shock of her husband's death. Having no son the property in the north went to a distant cousin, but the widow and daughters were amply provided for.

The youngest died soon after her father. The two others were lively, fashionable women yet, who might marry well.

Mr. Thorpe shook his head as he folded the letter away. It did not help him in the least. Clearly Lady Monkton had no relation who could have tampered with Brenda Dale's affections. Clearly, too, she was not the kind of woman to be unjust to a favourite confidential servant. What, then, was the mystery?

The three Miss Thorpes were not at all pleased with their father's conduct. They considered him lamentably weak, and discussed the schoolmistress with their favourite friend, Miss Moore, whose opinion was far more in accordance with their wishes.

"She ought to be got rid of!" said this spinster, who was a few years older than her brother. "I am sure she is the last person to suit us. Why, would you believe it, girls, I went in the other night to speak to her about the needlework, and she was actually practising Italian songs!"

"Abundant!" cried the admiring chorus. "I told her it was quite against the rules, and that I should speak to the managers about it; and she actually had the impertinence to tell me that after school hours her time was her own!"

"How very shocking!"

"And," here Miss Moore lowered her voice, as though horrified at what she had to say, "I actually remonstrated with Geoffrey, and he refused to interfere. He said Miss Dale was quite right. Isn't it terrible!"

"It is, indeed!" said Ada, warmly. "This creature seems to bewitch all the gentlemen. Papa defends her through thick and thin."

Miss Moore sighed plaintively. She had rather a desire to console the Vicar for his wife's death.

"Your dear father is too charitable. I told Geoffrey it was his duty to protect Mr. Thorpe from being taken in!"

"Who do you suppose she is?" demanded Lucy. "A Jesuit in disguise come to turn those poor children into Papists! Such things have been heard of, you know."

"I think it is worse than that," said Miss Moore, severely. "She hasn't come about any religion. I believe she's an actress, and that she tired of her profession, and thought she should like to marry a rich man. The creature is setting traps for Geoffrey or your father. I'm not sure which."

But Margaret differed. She was severe and narrow-minded, but she had a trifle more common sense than her sisters or Miss Moore.

"I don't think it's that. I rather fancy she has done something very wicked, and is afraid of being found out. I think she has come here to hide herself from justice."

"She doesn't look like a murderer."

"She need not have killed anyone. She may have stolen a great deal of money, or have forged someone's name. I am quite sure she is hiding. Why, whenever she sees a stranger she looks frightened to death. Her eyes have a strange, hunted look in them, just as though she fancied the police were on her track."

Lucy, who was not so strong-minded as her sisters, shivered.

"It is enough to make one's hair stand on end to think we have a criminal in our midst," she said, nervously. "Miss Moore, you who are so clever, might surely find out her secret, and get her sent away."

"I shall do my best," said Lydia Moore, gravely. "It seems a clear duty to the Vicar and my brother to clear such a space from their path. But I advise you to do nothing rashly, girls. We must find out her secret before we attempt to get rid of her. When once we know it we can make our own terms, and free Triggington of Miss Dale."

And these were women who called themselves Christians. These were women who went to church, and were taught to "love their neighbour as themselves."

Brenda Dale had never injured them in thought or word, yet they had bound themselves by a firm resolution to hunt her from her humble refuge. Alas! for charity as practised by the ladies of Triggington!

CHAPTER II.

In the west-end of London stood a large, handsome house, furnished with every comfort, and possessing that unmistakable air of substantial prosperity which marks the residence of the well-to-do.

It was the abode of Lady Monkton and her daughters, Mr. Grant's late parishioners—the ladies who had taken Brenda Dale from her country home as humble companion and tirewoman.

They had broken off all intercourse with Elinmonkton, for they had loved the Court with almost passionate warmth, and could not bring themselves to see their old home in the possession of a stranger.

They had refused all advances from Sir Gordon, quite forgetting that it was hardly his fault that no son or brother of theirs lived to step between him and wealth.

Sir Lionel had been a rich man; but a great deal of his property was entailed, and went with the title. Besides this, his wife had her jointure of five hundred a-year, and the rest of the money he left behind him passed absolutely to his youngest child.

It was rather hard on Miss Monkton and her sister Jane, but their father was powerless to prevent it. Years before, when it first became probable, he would have no son, and he was trying to make a suitable provision for his family when they should have to leave the Court, a friend stepped forward.

He was an old man, and had outlived all his relations. He lived near the Court, and had a devoted affection for little "Birdie," Sir Lionel's youngest daughter. He offered to make the Baronet his heir on the sole condition that every penny of his bequest passed at her father's death to his favourite.

It seemed to Lionel Monkton folly to refuse fifteen thousand a-year. It would brighten the last part of his life with every comfort, and secure affluence to his family. The only thing was, it might bring a division among the girls for one to be so richly dowered, and the others barely provided for. Mr. Airlie was ready with his expedient. Until Birdie married, or reached the age of thirty, her mother should enjoy the interest of her fortune. There would be no need to take the world at large, or even Sir Lionel's own children, into their confidence. The deed of settlement could be drawn up, and a trusty lawyer appointed guardian of the young lady's interests.

Sir Lionel outlived his friend by ten years. He was able to give his children every possible advantage, and from the bottom of his heart he hoped that Jane and Maria would marry in his own lifetime; but, unfortunately, the Miss Monktons aimed too high. They refused the one or two quiet country gentlemen who presented themselves as suitors; and when their father died, although eight and nine-and-twenty respectively, had no chance of changing their name.

They were strong-minded. Their mother was essentially weak and easy-going. She had always leaned on her husband. That prop removed she leaned on Maria. The result anyone might have expected. Before Sir Lionel had been dead three months, Maria and Jane knew all about Mr. Airlie's deed of gift, and the humiliating truth that, whenever Birdie married, they and their mother would be left with only five hundred a year, while at Lady Monkton's death a third of that small income would be lost to them.

The two sisters discussed the matter gravely between themselves, and came to a firm decision. Birdie must not be allowed to marry. In that case the income would be her family's until she was thirty. In the twelve years thus gained Jane and Maria must manage to save a handsome competence. They arranged that five thousand a-year should be the sum total of their expenditure; the balance remaining at interest and compound interest would amount to quite a fortune by the time their sister was thirty.

Lady Monkton was as wax in their hands. She was devoted to her elder girls; while she could never forget that Birdie, besides almost costing her own life, had come in the place of the son so ardently desired.

Poor little Birdie! She had been her father's pet and darling. To lose him was in itself a bitter blow, but worse followed. She was taken from the country, and settled down in a dull London house. Their recent harassment admitted of no gaiety, even if her sisters had allowed her to participate in their amusements. She was as lonely and neglected as a girl of eighteen could be, and began to perceive that Jane and Maria had passed from the indifference they had always shown her to an active dislike.

To her life's end Birdie Monkton never looked back on the time that followed without a shudder. Often and often she longed to go forth into the great world and earn her bread, even as a shop-girl or machinist. It seemed to her that any toil, however hard, would have been preferable to those endless days of lonely idleness.

There came a change at last, just when the girl was beginning to look white and languid from the monotonous weariness of her life. Maria fell ill, and the malady was pronounced to be scarlet fever of a most malignant type.

Jane, who, to do her justice, dearly loved her eldest sister, elected to remain with the invalid, and assist the professional nurse in the care of her; but she at once decreed that her mother and Birdie must fly from all chance of infection.

Lady Monkton was like a reed in her daughter's hands. Jane took a furnished house in an obscure Herefordshire village, and packed off her mother and younger sister. Brenda Dale went with them as personal attendant, two servants being left by the owner of the house; and as it was summer time, and the country was looking glorious, they would have every chance of a pleasant home, if any place could be so to Lady Monkton, while her first-born was dangerously ill.

"It is only a small house," Jane explained to her mother, "and it is in the heart of the country, so that you are not likely to be troubled with visitors; but, of course, you will take care that Birdie forms no promiscuous acquaintance. You know how much depends on it."

Lady Monkton nodded.

"You may trust me, Jane. I will be careful. That unfortunate girl shall not worry

you and poor Maria more than she has already done."

Jane was not quite content.

"I have noticed in Birdie a decided taste for low society. You must not be satisfied by knowing she has no acquaintances of her own rank. Keep her aloof from everyone. It is the only way, unless we are all to be genteel paupers for the rest of our lives."

Lady Monkton promised, and no doubt would have kept her word; but the very day after her arrival at Laurel Cottage she sprained her foot, and was a prisoner to the house, since there was no carriage in the village she deemed suitable to her rank.

It was impossible to keep Birdie always shut up in the little house through the lovely June days. It was equally impossible—or the selfish lady thought so—to spare Brenda Dale to accompany her. And so it ended in Birdie wandering through the fields and lanes at her own sweet will, enjoying the sight and sound of country life as freely as in her father's lifetime.

Lippert's End was a tiny village, but it had one or two houses of superior rank, and the largest of these was occupied by a clergyman, who took pupils to prepare for different examinations. He rarely had more than four at a time—not mere boys, but full-grown men, some of them of the highest rank and standing; others sons of ambitious tradesfolk, who wished their offspring to occupy a higher position in society than themselves.

At this time Basil Derwent was Mr. Glyn's senior pupil. He was four-and-twenty, older than most of the inmates of Lippert's House. He was the cadet of a noble family, and his mother had stood out as long as possible against his accepting an appointment in India, which was the only provision his uncle saw fit to find for him.

Poverty, however, had been stronger than pride, and the Honourable Mrs. Derwent had at last consented to the expatriation of her son; and Basil came to Mr. Glyn's to prepare in hot haste for an examination, his passing which was essential to his success.

He learned something more than the subjects his tutor included in his course, namely, to conjugate the verb "to love." Birdie Monkton was his teacher.

The young people met first by accident, when Basil was happy enough to save the girl from a wild bull. After that, by chance or design, their paths always seemed to cross, until at last, one August day, Basil confessed his secret, and pleaded for Birdie's love.

"I have little enough to offer you, my darling," he said, sadly. "As soon as I reach India I shall have an income of three hundred a-year, and after the first five years it will be raised to a sum that I think would be sufficient for us. Birdie, do you think you could wait five years for me?"

"I would wait my life for you," the girl answered, bravely. "I love you, Basil, just as you do me. We are so young, dear, the five years will soon pass, and then we shall have all our lives to spend together."

"Shall I speak to your mother, Birdie?" he asked, anxiously. "Do you think she would consent to our engagement?"

Birdie shook her head.

"I can't explain it to you, Basil, but mother has the greatest objection to people being engaged. She seems to think it madness!"

Mr. Derwent opened his eyes.

"But if so, Birdie, she must have been mad herself once. Do you mean, little girl, her own marriage was so unhappy she fears the same fate for her daughter?"

"My father was the kindest, bravest man in the whole world!" cried Birdie, eagerly; "and he and mamma were devoted to each other. I think no family could have been happier than ours until papa died."

Mr. Derwent felt puzzled. He had no idea of Lady Monkton's income, still less that all but a fraction of it belonged to Birdie.

Seeing the modest house in which the ladies

were staying, and his darling's plain, untrimmed dresses, he had fancied Sir Lionel's death had left his widow very badly off.

"I would rather speak to Lady Monkton, dear," he said, bravely. "I can't bear that she should think I had tried to lure you into a clandestine engagement. Is your mother ambitious for you, Birdie?"

"Not for me. She is very anxious that Maria and Jane should marry well. But she has told me several times she intends to keep me at home."

Basil Derwent smiled.

"If she can," he corrected. "Birdie, do you mean you object to my speaking to Lady Monkton, not because I am a poor man, but because she is averse to the idea of your marrying anyone?"

"I mean just that, Basil. Mamma is wrapped up in Jane and Maria. She can't bear anyone to take any notice of me. I am sure, if you spoke to her, she would be terribly angry."

"With me?"

"No, with me. She would say I had insulted my sisters, and was nothing but a foolish child. Basil, once, when she fancied someone liked me, she threatened to put me in a convent. She only relented when she found he had never cared for me but as a friend."

Basil felt indignant.

"Lady Monkton must be mad!" he cried, hotly. "Birdie, I will never leave you under her power. You must be mine before I go to India!"

"She will never let me."

"I shall not ask her," returned Basil, gravely, and forthwith he propounded his scheme.

He was going up to London the next day on business. He would get a marriage license, and Birdie should meet him the following morning, and be made his wife. Though only nineteen she looked older than her age.

Lippert's End had no station of its own, but an omnibus ran between the village and a large local junction, from which he could be whirled up to London in less than an hour.

"I dare not take you to India until I have made a home for you," said Basil, fondly; "but, Birdie, I will shorten the time of waiting by every means in my power, and I can bear the reparation better if, at least, I know that you are my wife."

"But your own relations, Basil? What would they say to such a thing?"

Basil parried the question.

"You know, my darling, what you have told me of Lady Monkton makes me terribly uneasy. If she really possesses this horror of matrimony, and anyone whispered our secret to her, she might be for sending you to a convent, as she threatened before. If only you are my wife—if I leave you with the certificate of our marriage—you will be able to stand against her tyranny."

The girl clung to him as though she felt she needed his protection even then.

"Are you quite sure you wish it, Basil?"

"I wish it more than anything in the world, sweetheart. It will be hard work to leave you anyway, Birdie; but I shall carry away a lighter heart if I know that you are my wife."

Brenda Dale was taken into their confidence. The pretty maid was fairly devoted to her young lady, and espoused the lovers' cause heart and soul. Birdie's scruples were hushed to rest. Lady Monkton was kept in ignorance of her daughter's absence; and the girl, dressed in a soft white serge, with a plain sailor hat and white ribbons went up to London, and standing by Basil's side in a grim old city church, vowed to be his true and loving wife till death did them part.

It was a stolen marriage, but Birdie had no sense of wrong-doing. Her mother and sisters did not want her. They told her so every week of her life, and let her feel it oftener still. There was no one but Basil who loved her. She would have been true to

him, in thought and deed, without this bond; but if he felt happier to leave her as his wife so it should be.

"My own at last!" said Basil Derwent, when he and his bride went out of the grim old church into the glorious summer sunshine.

"I don't think you need say 'at last!'" remarked Birdie, simply. "It is not two months yet since we first met!"

"Not two months! Birdie, I have a great deal to say to you, and but little time to say it. Let us sit down here, dear, and think out our plans."

He had led her into the Temple-gardens, fragrant with the scent of sweet peas and mignonette. He found her a seat in a retired spot, and said simply,—

"I have passed my examination, Birdie."

She looked into his face, and understood. "Then the time for your going to India is fixed. Oh, Basil, we must say good-bye to-day; that is why you have brought me here."

"Good-bye, indeed, but only for a term," he urged. "I am to sail from Southampton next week, and I must spend the last few days that remain with my mother. She is in Scotland. I am her only son, and I can hardly go out to India without saying farewell to her."

"Of course not!" Birdie gathered her courage. "Will you write to me, Basil, and tell me your address so that I may answer your letters?"

"Of course, I will." He took a card and wrote a few words on it hurriedly in pencil. "That will find me, darling, till I sail. I shall write to you as soon as I get to Scotland, and give you the exact time of my leaving England. Oh, Birdie, how I wish you were going too!"

She wished it herself, poor child. Basil looked down at the bright, gold wedding ring, which shone through her thin, silk glove.

"Shall you be able to wear it, Birdie?"

"I shall not dare," replied the girl, sadly. "Basil, I should like to give it to you!"

"To give me your wedding-ring, sweetheart? What can you mean?"

"I may not wear it, and I have no safe hiding-place. I should like you to have it best, Basil, for it will remind you of me."

"Do you think I shall forget?" he asked her, half reproachfully, but he let her pull off the ring and give it into his keeping. He looked at the little golden hoop tenderly as he said gravely, "Some day I shall put it back in its right place. Meanwhile, sweetheart, I shall guard it for your sake."

"Basil," asked the girl, half plaintively, "don't you think we could meet just once more? Couldn't you spare me one-half-hour dear, before you go to India?"

"I will try. Birdie, we must manage. So look happy, dear. This is not good-bye. We will meet once more!"

CHAPTER III.

MARIA MONKTON recovered; but Jane, who had nursed her with devoted skill, took the infection and died.

Lady Monkton was quite broken down by the blow, and Birdie had to soothe her almost as a child. To leave her for an hour was impossible, and the bare idea of being absent from her long enough to go up to London and meet Basil was not to be thought of for a moment.

Birdie therefore wrote to her husband a tender, affectionate letter, explaining the trouble that had befallen her, and concluding,—

"So that our good-bye in the Temple-gardens must really be our last, dear. But I know you will come home to me as soon as you can. Meanwhile, we must trust each other, and write by every mail."

She signed the letter simply "Your own Birdie"—not for her to write the sacred name of "wife" before he had called her by it.

She posted her letter with her own hands, and then she waited in loving expectation for the answer.

None came. The days passed, still Basil Derwent did not write. At last Birdie, almost beside herself, took the omnibus to the neighbouring town, and went to the free library to search in the shipping news whether the *Seraph* had actually sailed.

Yes, it was down on the appointed day. She knew Basil had taken his passage in this vessel, and that his purse was far too slender for him to have forfeited the money paid for it. She could think nothing but that her husband had left England without sending a line to comfort her aching heart.

Birdie had no friends in Lippett's End, no confidant in the world except Brenda Dale. The young maid was divided between sympathy with her young lady and indignation at Mr. Derwent's neglect.

For Birdie's sake she managed to scrape acquaintance with one of Mr. Glyn's servants, and asked the woman point-blank what had become of the "tall young gentleman" she used to see about so often?

The cook, who had not taken much interest in Basil Derwent, applied the description to another of Mr. Glyn's students, a bold, dashing young fellow of nineteen, and she promptly gave—as she thought—the desired information.

"His pa died, and he came into a heap of money. He was a handsome man to look at; but between me and you, Miss Dale, he was a rank bad one for anything else. They do say he'd married a barmaid in London, and the old gentleman parted them, and sent him down here to be out of the way. He never did a stroke of work, and the master was glad enough to get rid of him."

Although Brenda Dale had never been in love herself, she had sufficient sympathy with her young lady not to carry this sorry news to her.

She only told Birdie she had been unable to get any satisfactory information about Mr. Derwent, and she thought the best thing to do would be to wait till his letter came.

"He can't write now till he gets to India," said Birdie, gloomily. "I shall have to wait six weeks."

Long before the six weeks were over they went back to the house in Greville-square, which had been ordered to be thoroughly disinfected in their absence.

Perhaps the orders had been neglected or badly carried out, or else grief and suspense had made poor Birdie a ready prey to disease.

Before she had been home many days she was stricken with the fever, and every hour of Brenda Dale's time was spent in nursing her.

She was hovering between life and death when a letter arrived with an Indian stamp, addressed to "Miss Dale, care of Lady Monkton, 55, Greville-square."

The two young lovers had agreed, for precaution, that their correspondence should be carried on through Brenda.

Maria Monkton, who always opened the letter-box herself, decided there was something very suspicious in their pretty maid having a foreign correspondent, and slipped the letter into her own pocket.

This lady had few scruples, and once alone in the security of her own room, with the door fastened, she coolly held the envelope over a basin of boiling water, and in a few moments could open it without the fraction of a tear. Her face grew first bewildered, then horrified, as she read the opening lines:—

"MY DEAREST BIRDIE.—Why did you not meet me as we arranged? Darling, you sent me out to India with a sore heart, but—"

Miss Monkton had no patience with love-letters, never having had any such missives herself, and having got so far she quietly put the unfortunate sheet of paper in the fire.

"Fate has played into my hands," she thought, cheerfully. "For the next few

weeks Birdie will be incapable of writing to India. By that time the young man will have met someone else. He knows nothing of her wealth, and will soon forget her baby face. It is just as well she should have had this 'little affair.' A burnt child dreads the fire; and after one experience of man's perfidy she will be content to leave the sex alone in future."

Birdie had not the slightest desire to live. She felt too miserable to care about getting better; and when, one day, towards the end of October they carried her to a sofa, and prophesied in a week she would be able to walk about, she only shook her head and began to cry.

"What is it?" asked the doctor, beckoning Brenda to follow him from the room, and speaking in a confidential tone. "Is there anything on her mind?"

"I think her heart's broken," said the young nurse, sadly. "I've done my best to get her better, because I love her dearly, but I'm not sure but that she would have been happier in her grave."

Dr. Carrington looked at Brenda keenly. "Do you mean she has a lover? Where is he? He ought to be here."

Brenda hesitated.

"No one knows anything about it but me," she said, uncomfortably, "and I don't know what to do. I wish you'd let me tell you everything, Dr. Carrington. I need not mention names, and if you want to cure Miss Birdie you ought to know."

"I do want to cure her, and I will give you the best advice in my power. Sit down."

He always treated Brenda as though she had been a daughter of the house. In truth, the country damsel had nothing of a servant about her. She never wore caps nor aprons. She was called in the household "Miss Dale," and when Birdie was well her duties were more those of a companion than maid.

"He was studying with a tutor while we were at Lippett's End, and he was always meeting Miss Birdie. He saved her life once, or they thought he did, and the end of it was they were engaged."

"I suppose he was a gentleman?" hazarded the doctor.

"I thought so. He didn't behave as such. He persuaded her into a secret marriage by saying he was going to India. They parted in London an hour after the wedding, and she has never had a word or line from him since."

"Do you suppose he went to India?"

"I know he didn't. The housekeeper at his tutor's told me all about him. He was under age, and had married a barmaid in London. His father was so angry that he parted them, and sent the young man down to a country village on the plea of studying, but really to get him out of the way."

Dr. Carrington looked very grave.

"I can't understand it," he said, gravely.

"He couldn't marry two wives."

"I've thought over it till I've felt quite dazed," admitted Brenda. "He was a pleasant-spoken young gentleman enough; and you see he may have thought the barmaid wasn't his legal wife, and he might take another. Then maybe he spoke to a lawyer about it, and found out his mistake."

"Then he ought to write to Miss Monkton."

"He may think it better for her to forget him. I could make that out. What puzzles me is his telling her he was going to India."

Dr. Carrington looked very grave.

"And you think this is on her mind?"

"I'm quite sure of it, and I can't decide whether I'd better tell her what I heard from Mr. Glyn's housekeeper, or just let her go on yearning for news of him and believing him her husband."

"I think as soon as she is better you ought to tell her. Supposing he had gone to India, when could she have heard from him?"

"Three weeks ago. At the onset of her illness."

"Perhaps Lady Monkton kept back the letters till her daughter recovered?"

"She'd not know they were for Miss Birdie, sir. They were to come under cover to me. None of the family would interfere with my letters."

"I can only repeat my advice. As soon as Miss Monkton is better tell her the exact truth. I believe, in such cases, anything is better than suspense."

And meanwhile Maria Monkton worked her cruel will. A second of those Indian letters came, and was opened by her in the same manner. She did not attempt to read this epistle, but she carefully noted down the address on the first page, and the signature "Basil Derwent."

That afternoon Miss Monkton wrote a letter on her most funeral sheet of writing-paper, with her hardest and most pin-like steel pen.

"55, Greville-square, Kensington,
October 20, 1888.

"SIR,—Hearing from the maid-servant, Brenda Dale, of the tie which subsisted between yourself and my younger sister, I have to inform you that the unfortunate girl died of scarlet fever, contracted almost immediately after you left England. Of your conduct in drawing so young a girl into a clandestine engagement I will not speak here. We would fain guard her memory from even the shadow of a reproach; and, therefore, we desire that the episode of her intimacy with you should remain a secret. For the same reason my mother, my remaining sister and myself request, as the only favour that you can do us, that you will neither answer this letter or seek our acquaintance on your return to England.—I am, sir, your obedient servant,
"MARIA MONKTON."

The letter sent and despatched, Miss Monkton kept a firm watch on the post-bag for six weeks longer. Then she ceased to have the task of burning an Indian missive regularly every mail-day, and came to the conclusion that the "young man" had received her information, and was going to comply with her request.

Birdie's recovery was very slow. She looked so white and fragile that some dormant mother-love was roused in Lady Monkton's heart; and seeing how the girl shrank from her London home, she arranged to send the convalescent and Brenda Dale down to Bournemouth for the rest of the winter, while she and Maria tried to find a tenant for 55, Greville-square, which they felt they never could like as a home without Jane.

Maria had another reason for desiring to move. As she had never read one of Basil Derwent's letters through she had not grasped the fact that he was her sister's husband.

She thought of him only as Birdie's lover; and while congratulating herself on the clever fraud that had parted them, was quite alive to the danger of their meeting if Mr. Derwent returned to England in a few years' time.

So, even with some pecuniary loss, she was glad to sublet the large house in Greville-square, and remove to quite a different part of London.

They had been into no society while they lived in Kensington, owing to their deep mourning for their father. By changing their abode and engaging an entirely fresh staff of servants, she would be able to guard her secret, and leave no one to betray her deception, and warn Basil Derwent that it was the second, and not the youngest, daughter of Sir Lionel whom the cruel fever had carried off as its victim.

Unwomanly as was her conduct, Maria was quite unconscious of its heartlessness. To her own mind she was only fighting for her own rights.

She was the eldest daughter. Her father had made a compact with Mr. Airlie that would enable Birdie to take fifteen thousand a year the day she married, leaving her mother and sister five hundred.

To Maria's mind it was simple justice that she should endeavour to keep her youngest sister a spinster as long as possible.

The lawyer, who was Birdie's trustee, heard of her illness, and called upon Lady Monkton to inquire after his ward.

Mr. Ogle, good, easy man, arrived rather tardily, since the invalid was not only out of danger, but had started that very day for Bournemouth with her faithful companion, Brenda Dale.

"I never was more surprised in my life than when I heard Miss Beatrice was ill!" he said, frankly. "I always thought you'd take as much care of her as though you put her in a glass case, knowing how much hinged on her life."

Maria felt affronted.

"I don't consider Beatrice has anything to complain of," she said, sharply. "She had every care and attention during her illness; but I don't see any reason for buying a great deal hinges on her life."

"I should have said there were fifteen thousand reasons," said the lawyer, cheerfully. "You see, Miss Monkton, you and your mother have been accustomed to every luxury. I fear you would find it a great change if anything happened to your sister, and you had to depend on my lady's slender jointure."

"But, mamma, is Birdie's natural hair," dismantled Maria, "so we should have the money just the same."

Mr. Ogle shook his head.

"If Miss Beatrice dies unmarried, every penny of it goes to charitable institutions. I thought you were aware of this!"

Maria felt thankful Birdie had been sent to healthy, salubrious Bournemouth, and that she had resisted her own prejudices, and allowed Brenda Dale to accompany her sister.

Maria's first impulse, on discovering that Brenda had been in the lovers' confidence, was to get rid of the girl at once.

She only hesitated for two reasons. She could not well confess how she discovered Brenda's offences; and hard-hearted and strong minded though she was, she had not been able to resist the way in which her sister clung to her humble friend.

So Brenda took her young lady to Bournemouth, and the two girls had lodgings in a pretty house where they could smell the scent of the pines, and watch the restless waves of the English Channel.

And then it was that the elder of the two told the other the story she had heard at Lippett's End; and Birdie learned that, instead of being a deserted wife, she had never been a wife at all!

"He must have deceived me from the very first," said Beatrice Monkton; sadly, "for he never mentioned his father. Indeed, he told me more than once his mother was a widow. Oh! Brenda, he couldn't have been false from the first! There must be some mistake."

"That's what I've said myself again and again, my Birdie," said Brenda, who dropped the humbler address in these hours of intimacy. "But you see, dear, we must look at it in this way. If the housekeeper was mistaken, and Mr. Derwent all you thought him, why did he never answer the letter you sent him in Scotland? Why has he left you all these weeks without a line, knowing all the time you were in sore trouble, and that you hadn't got his address in India?"

Beatrice sighed.

"Then you have quite lost faith in him, Brenda? You think him wicked and heartless?"

"No, I don't!" protested Brenda, stoutly. "I've thought over it again and again, and I believe he'd repented of his wild ways, and wanted to turn over a new leaf and settle down. I think he loved you dearly—who could help it?—and believing the barmaid wasn't his real wife, thought he had a right to marry you. Maybe, when his father died, she claimed to be acknowledged as Mrs. Derwent, and the lawyers said it was her right. Then the poor young gentleman felt too grieved and ashamed to write to you. That's how I understand it."

"Love brings only sorrow," said Birdie, sadly. "Oh, Brenda, life is very hard!"

On her own account Brenda was finding it very pleasant just then.

Dr. Carrington had come down to Bournemouth, openly to visit Miss Monkton at her mother's request, really to inform Brenda that he had been appointed head physician to a large provincial hospital, and to beg her, when he took up work there in the spring, to go with him as his wife.

"I am not a lady," said Brenda, gravely. "I believe Lady Monkton looks on me as a servant. My father was the village postmaster; and all my relatives, if I had any, would be plain working people. You would destroy all your prospects if you married me, Dr. Carrington."

"And you will destroy all my hopes if you refuse," he replied. "Brenda, you and I have watched together by Beatrice Monkton's bedside, and I have learned to love your sweet, unselfish nature. You are a gentlewoman in thought and feeling. Whatever position you filled in Lady Monkton's household, the fact remains that you are her daughter's friend. I am not a rich man, but I have plenty for comfort. At Dalsbury you will meet none of the Monkton set. People will know you as my wife, and learn to like and esteem you for your own sake. I have not a relative in the world whom I need consult. You are your own mistress. Why should we not spend our lives together?"

Beatrice Monkton heard of the engagement with mingled feelings. She was too fond of Brenda not to rejoice in her happiness. On the other hand, when her devoted nurse became Mrs. Carrington she would be more alone than ever. Alone, that is, in heart and feeling.

Of course her mother and sister would expect her to live with them in the new house at Maids Vale. Somehow, the very thought of going back to her relations was terrible to poor Beatrice; so when Brenda Dale's wedding had been fixed for July, and Lady Monkton, under the physician's advice, had agreed to leaving her youngest daughter at Bournemouth till the summer, Birdie's active brain thought of a way out of her difficulties, which resulted in the mystery which so troubled the people of Triggington.

"Brenda, you love me very much, don't you?" she asked, suddenly, of the bride-elect.

"Miss Beatrice," said Brenda, solemnly. "I love you better than anyone in the world except John, and I'd give years of my own life if I could but buy you happiness."

"I shall never be happy again," and Birdie looked full into her friend's face with her beautiful sad eyes. "But there is something you could do for me, Brenda, that would brighten my life. If I go back to mamma and Maria I think I shall go mad!"

"Wouldn't you like to go to Elmhurst, dear?" asked Brenda. "There's many there would welcome you gladly!"

"No, I want to earn my own living, Brenda, and you must help me."

Brenda Dale was a simple country girl, and knew little of the law, and how she would infringe it if she agreed to her friend's request. To her it seemed an easy thing to lend her name to Beatrice.

She knew that Lady Monkton would never have suffered her daughter to work for her own living, and no clergyman would engage as a village schoolmistress the child of a baronet.

She felt that Beatrice would pine away if she had to return to her unloved home, and that hard work was the best cure for bitter heartache.

She knew that in a private family the governess has many aughts to bear. With a tiny home of her own, and little children to teach and care for, Birdie would have more chance of happiness; and, so after a brief struggle, John Carrington's fiancée gave way.

The girls began to take in a journal specially devoted to the interests of National

Schools, and there very soon they saw Mr. Thorpe's advertisement.

It attracted them for two reasons. It was a part of England where Birdie had never been before, and where she was not likely to meet anyone she had ever known. Then the Vicar of Triggington did not aspire to a "trained" teacher, and specially wished her to be young.

Educated in their childhood together in the schoolroom at Monkton Court, Brenda Dale and Beatrice wrote an almost similar hand.

Their old governess, if she had been shown the application sent in to Triggington for the vacant post, would have answered promptly that it was written by Brenda.

So it was settled. The two friends left Bournemouth on the same day—Brenda Dale to spend a few days in London at the home of a friend of Dr. Carrington's, from which she was soon to go forth a bride—Birdie avowedly to return to her mother, really to journey to Triggington.

Brenda parted from her at Waterloo. They had agreed it was better, in case of cross-questioning, she should not know her friend's last movements.

When she was out of sight Birdie took a cab to Victoria-station, thence one train to Kensington, and another to Clapham Junction; and having thus, as she fondly hoped, destroyed all clue to her destination, she finally reached Dring by the "afternoon train," and was conveyed to Triggington in Joe Sanders' cart.

CHAPTER IV.

BASIL DERWENT sat in his own bungalow awaiting for the arrival of the English mail—not that he expected any particular pleasure from his correspondence. Since the letter telling him of his young wife's death he had been strangely indifferent to all that happened in England.

He had loved Beatrice Monkton passionately, and he had been true to her in thought and word; but fate had been cruelly hard on the two young lovers.

Basil's mother stopped the note the girl wrote to her husband in Scotland, telling him of her sister Jane's death, and begging him to send her his address in India.

The Honourable Mrs. Derwent was selfish to the core. She intended her son to remain single, or marry for wealth.

The pretty grey envelope, with its dainty feminine writing, aroused her suspicion. She opened it, read the letter, and considering it dangerous threw it into the fire.

Oddly enough, her conduct resembled Maria Monkton's in something besides its treachery. Like that astute spinster, the inference she drew from Birdie's note was that the two foolish young people were engaged—not married.

So his wife's letter never reached Basil. From the moment he parted from her in London he heard nothing of her till he received the cold, formal note in which Maria announced her death.

He never doubted this statement. He knew that scarlet fever had attacked one member of the family, and that his darling had taken the disease on returning to the infected home seemed to him quite feasible.

Besides, if Birdie had been alive she would never have left him in ignorance of her fate. His letters, being sent under cover to Brenda Dale, surely reached her.

He mourned for her very truly. His was not a shallow nature. It seemed to him that with Birdie he lost not only his life's love, but all spur to ambition. He really did not care very much what happened to him now, and was quite content to remain in India for an indefinite time at three hundred a-year.

The sadness which marked his thoughts showed a little in his letters, and the Honourable Mrs. Derwent had rather repented of her indifference.

She had had a severe illness since Basil left England, and perhaps it softened her heart,

and reminded her how lonely life was without her son.

And now important letters came! Basil turned them over in astonishment. One from his mother, and another from a stray friend, generally represented the extent of his correspondence; but now there were actually four letters, and one of them had a deep black edge.

Basil's thoughts flew to his mother. Could it be that the cold days of early spring had been fatal to her enfeebled frame?

He read the black-edged letter before any of the others—read it twice through from beginning to end before he in the least realised its meaning.

"MY DEAR BASIL,—
"Heaven has taken my children to itself, and I am a lonely man. Come home as soon as you possibly can, and take your rightful place as heir of Elsingham."

"Your affectionate uncle,
"FERNLEY."

Basil could hardly understand it even then. He knew, of course, that his father's elder brother was the Earl of Fernley; but Mrs. Derwent had never managed to get on with her husband's family, and had quarrelled with them all before she was left a widow.

Basil had always understood Lord Fernley possessed several children, some of them grown-up and married. He had never in his life cast a thought to inheriting the title or estates.

The next letter was more businesslike. It was from the Fernley lawyer, and told him that Lord Elsingham and his little son were killed in a railway accident, and that within a month his only brother died of inflammation of the lungs, caught while attending the double funeral.

Three daughters were now Lord Fernley's only children, and the entail excluding females they could inherit nothing but their father's personal property.

The other letters were merely friendly congratulations. There was nothing from his mother except a newspaper, with the record of Charles Derwent's death underlined.

Each of the letters urged his immediate return to England, as a matter of course; the lawyer even intimated that his bankers had instructed their branch at Bombay to place two hundred pounds to Mr. Basil Derwent's credit.

Basil could hardly believe it was true. He felt neither joy nor elation—nothing but a real sympathy with the bereaved father, and a kind of dull, stony despair that for him prosperity had come too late.

Money smooths most difficulties. Basil resigned his appointment at once, but expressed his willingness to remain at his post until his successor arrived.

Accordingly a cable was sent home requesting a suitable man should be sent out; and in six weeks from the time of receiving his uncle's letter Basil sailed for England.

He was only just in time. Lord Fernley lived long enough to receive his heir's assurance that he would carry out some improvements the old man had at heart, and play a brother's part to his three cousins, as well as to the widowed Lady Elsingham.

Then there was another funeral from Elsingham Towers, and the ex-Government clerk was Earl of Fernley.

No one could question the generosity of the new peer. He kept on all his uncle's old servants. He offered the Dower House to Lady Elsingham for her life. He was kind and cordial to his cousins, even to one of them who had married against her father's wish, and was rather snubbed by her sisters. He fulfilled every expectation that could possibly be formed of him.

He won golden opinions on every side; and then, having taken his seat in the House of Lords, he went down to Elsingham Towers, apparently intending to make the grand old place his headquarters.

Mrs. Derwent was with him—only for the summer months, as she took care to inform everyone. She hated the country in winter; and now that Basil was rich, of course he would provide her with a house in London.

"Do you mean to desert me utterly, mother?" he asked, one day, when she told him of her wishes. "Don't you think I shall be terribly lonely in this rambling old place?"

"You must marry, Basil. You are the head of the family now, and you owe it to your name."

Basil shook his head.
"I believe there are some Derwents left. My uncle said we had some remote cousins in Yorkshire. They will have to keep up the family honour! I shall never marry, mother!"

"Basil, you are jesting!"
"I am in sober earnest, mother. I don't think I shall change my mind."

"You are nothing but a boy."
"I am five-and-twenty."

"And when did you take up this preposterous fancy about never marrying, pray?"

"Very soon after I reached India."

The time passed. Mrs. Derwent tried to believe he had been mistaken; but she soon noticed he was completely changed from the gay, high-spirited Basil who had gone abroad.

This Basil was always quiet and grave. He did not mope or shut himself up from society. He took his part in all the functions which came to him as the richest nobleman in the county; but there was a tinge of sadness in all he did, and his mother began to ask herself anxiously whether she had been too prudent for him, and, by suppressing that girlish letter, and wrecked the happiness of her son's life.

"I can't make you out, Basil," she said one day in an aggrieved tone. "I am sure when you came to me in Scotland you were as ambitious as possible. You seemed to long to make money; now you are richer than anyone in the county you don't seem to value your wealth."

"Times are changed, mother! When I was with you in Scotland I had an object in seeking wealth."

"What was it?"

"You wouldn't understand," said Basil, quietly. "We should only differ."

"I am not stupider than other people," returned his mother, sharply. "I suppose you were in love with some girl, and she jilted you? Well, she'll be sorry enough now."

"Hush!" cried Basil, almost sternly. "You don't understand. I had better tell you the bare facts, and then we will never speak of it again. She was my wife—and she died!"

"Your wife?"

"We loved each other, and she had not a happy home. I thought it would make the future easier if we were married before I left England. Then as my wife she could come to me in India if I were unable to return to fetch her."

"Who was she? A shop-girl?"

"Mother! She was the youngest child of Sir Lionel Monkton, and as good as she was beautiful."

"You will never forgive me, Basil; but I can't keep it back! A letter came from her while you were with me in Scotland, and I—burnt it."

"Mother!"

"How could I tell she was your wife and Lady Monkton's daughter?" demanded Mrs. Derwent, in an aggrieved tone. "Her letter was signed, 'Your own Birdie,' and she spoke of not being able to meet you because her mother could not spare her. I thought, of course, it was some passing flirtation, and that if you did not meet before you went to India you would soon forget her."

"I am not good at forgetting, mother. What must she have thought of me for leaving that letter unanswered? She may

have gone to her grave doubting me, poor darling!"

"When did you hear of her death?"

"Her sister wrote. I fancy Miss Monkton was a very peculiar woman. She seemed angry at our marriage, and asked, as the only favour I could do the family, that I would never try to make her acquaintance. My wife died, perhaps doubting me, and I cannot even visit her grave! I don't think many men make such shipwreck of their happiness as I have done of mine."

Mrs. Derwent was touched.

"You surely could write to Lady Monkton and ask where your wife was buried, Basil? No one could object to that."

"I have wronged her twice; first by stealing her daughter's love, and then by leaving my wife to die alone. I feel, mother, the Monktons deserve at least that I should respect their wish that I would not intrude on them."

"Had she no other friends?" asked Mrs. Derwent, her sympathy aroused at last.

"Only one. A young girl who was with her and Lady Monkton at Lippot's Ball as a kind of humble companion. Brenda Dale was in our confidence. She dressed my darling for our wedding. I doubt not she dressed her for the grave."

"Basil, you ought not to talk like this."

"I daresay it sounds unnatural," he answered, bitterly. "A year ago I was poor and obscure, and with no chance of a penny beyond what I earned. Now I am a wealthy nobleman; yet, mother, I would go back to poverty gladly, thankfally, if by so doing my Birdie might be given back to me."

Poor Mrs. Derwent knew not how to comfort him. It seemed to her that Basil's love was stronger than death, and that in the present Earl's time there would be no gentle wife, no merry children at Elsingham, for she felt her son's heart was buried in his first love's grave.

CHAPTER V.

It was November. The village mystery still inhabited the school-house of Triggington; and in spite of the league formed against her by Miss Moore and the ladies at the Vicarage, she seemed likely to continue to do so, for though this quarter cordially detested her none of them were school-managers.

That distinguished office was shared by the Vicar, Colonel Moore, and a certain Dr. Barnes, who studied economy more than anything else.

The Vicar was too charitable, the Colonel too chivalrous to dismiss Brenda Dale simply because she was beautiful and friendly; while, when her foes tried to get the ear of Dr. Barnes, he always met them with the reply that he was bound to consider the interests of the children, and to work the school as cheaply as it could be done effectually, and that in all his experience he had never seen so good a teacher as Miss Dale, who would be content with forty pounds a year.

The children fairly idolised their teacher. The parents, except such as were influenced by the Miss Thorpes, all expressed their satisfaction. Old Mrs. Drake, the lady-bountiful of Triggington, took a fancy to Miss Dale, and invited her to tea; and, in spite of the cabal against her, Birdie's life might have been happy but for two things. She could never forget Basil Derwent, and her conscience smote her for living under a false name.

She was ten times more content than she would have been with her mother and Maria at Maids Vale. She knew she did good, useful work, and her days were so fully occupied that she went to bed tired out.

Mrs. Carrington had sent the piano and other nick-nacks which the friends had saved money for during that long stay at Bodfham; and so Birdie had pretty things for her eyes to rest on, but—

Once, and once only, she had seen her friend when, at Mrs. Carrington's eager request, the village schoolmistress had met her at a junction between their respective homes, and spent an hour or two together.

Birdie learned then that her mother and Maria had taken her disappearance with great calmness, their one desire being that it should not reach the ears of the family lawyer, Mr. Ogil.

Dr. Carrington believed, from their anxiety on this head, they must be receiving money under Sir Lionel's will on account of Birdie's maintenance, which would be withheld if it transpired she was not under their care.

One more opinion of her husband's the happy young wife tried to impress on her friend. John thought Birdie's position ought to be settled beyond a doubt. If she would only tell him the name of the church where she was married, and authority to act in her name, he would go to Lippel's End and see Mr. Glyn. That gentleman would certainly know whether his late pupil went to India, or his address if he remained in England.

"For your own sake, dear," pleaded the true Brenda, "you ought to know whether you are wife or not. Think of the future. If you learned to love anyone you might break his heart if it transpired you were bound to Mr. Derwent!"

But the fictitious Brenda only shook her head.

"I shall never love anyone else. I know Dr. Carrington means all kindness, but I couldn't let anyone go making inquiries about Basil. It would seem like doubting him."

"But you do doubt him, dear!"

Birdie's tears fell beneath her veil.

"I know that he is not what I thought him, but I believe he loved me once, and I can never forget how happy I was when we were together. If he has wronged me, Brenda, he has yet given me the truest joy I ever knew; so things are equal!"

"And you like Triggington, dear?"

"Yes."

"And the people! Are they kind?"

"The Vicar and the other school-managers are very kind, but the young ladies hate me! They are always trying to 'keep me in my place.' And do you know, Brenda, I am rather wicked. I think it amuses me!"

She returned to Triggington by the "afternoon train." But this time Joe Sanders and his cart were not in attendance.

Birdie was thinking rather ruefully she should have to walk from the station, which, on the wet, muddy afternoon, was not pleasant, when Colonel Moore came up to her.

"My carriage is here, Miss Dale. I hope you will let it drop you at the School House."

No thought of harm came to the poor little schoolmistress.

Colonel Moore was quite as old as Joe—perhaps older, even. If she might ride *à la française* with one, why not with the other?

She stepped into the brougham without an idea she was outraging the feelings of Mrs. Grundy, and the Colonel behaved precisely as though she had been one of his sister's guests he was escorting home.

He talked to her of the weather, the coming Christmas, and other local matters. He never said a word that could remind her that she was young and beautiful—and he knew it—only, as he helped her out at her own door, he said, quietly,—

"I am so glad you have been taking a little holiday. You lead far too dull a life in this little village, Miss Dale!"

A very simple matter the being driven three miles on a muddy road when she was tired. Birdie little guessed all that was to come of it.

The next day, as she came out of Sunday school, a little note was put into her hand by one of Mrs. Drake's servants. It was a mere line, begging her to come to tea, as the writer particularly wished to see her.

"My dear," said Mrs. Drake, kindly, when they were alone, and Birdie had taken off her

wraps, "I want to speak to you. I am an old woman, and you are very young, so you mustn't be offended."

The schoolmistress blushed.

"I couldn't be offended, dear Mrs. Drake, you are so kind. But have I done anything wrong, that you look so grave?"

"I don't believe you have, but this place is a hotbed of gossip. Do you know the report the Miss Thorpes have set about, that you went to London for the day, yesterday, with Colonel Moore, and came home in his brougham?"

Birdie opened her eyes.

"I went about twenty miles down the line to meet a friend. I stayed with her nearly two hours, and then came back. I never set eyes on Colonel Moore till I was leaving the station. I was thinking how very muddy the lanes looked, when he offered me a seat in his carriage. Ought I to have refused?"

Mrs. Drake looked relieved.

"You were quite right to accept, but I am glad the other report was false. I am very fond of Geoffrey Moore, and my opinion of him would have changed if I had known he brought gossip on you."

Birdie looked into the kind old lady's face with a strange regret.

"Why do they all hate me so?" she asked, passionately. "I never injured the Miss Thorpes; they have a happy home, and a kind father. Why should they try to drive me from my humble cottage, where I earn my bread at least honestly?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Drake, simply, "do you never look in the glass?"

"Yes, but—"

"If you were ugly, or even merely plain, the Vicar's daughters would be your warm admirers. If you were vulgar or common they would think you just suited to your sphere. As it is, they object to you, in the first place, because you have the most beautiful face in the neighbourhood; and in the second, because they think it presumptuous of a national schoolmistress to be more refined and graceful than themselves."

Brenda looked up with troubled eyes.

"I am afraid, if you are right, Mrs. Drake, they will never be content until I have left Triggington."

The old lady nodded.

"Has it ever struck you, my dear, that Triggington is not quite an earthly paradise; and that, with your accomplishments, you might do better than remain a village schoolmistress?"

"I have no ambition," said Brenda, sadly, "and I dread strangers. I have been here long enough to grow used to the place and the children, and I dread the thought of a change. Do you think I am bound to give up my situation because the Miss Thorpes dislike me?"

"Not for that reason only—"

"And are there any others?"

Mrs. Drake looked at her shrewdly.

"My dear child, when four spiteful women have resolved to do an unkind thing they generally succeed in doing it. I have taken a great fancy to you, and if you left the village I should miss your sweet face; but I would rather you went away of your own free will, to—as the phrase goes—better yourself, than that you waited until the Vicar's daughters got their own way, and you left, as it were, under a cloud."

The tears were in Brenda's eyes. Mrs. Drake suddenly stooped and kissed her.

"I won't ask your history, my dear, because I think you have a right to your own secrets. I feel sure there is some bitter memory in your life which made you turn your back on your own friends, and come to teach our little rustics."

"Now, the Vicar is a good, kind man, but given to blunders. He is too just to be influenced by his girls' prejudices; but he thinks if only he could enlighten them as to your real history they would be sorry for their mistake, and treat you better."

"He came to see me yesterday, and he told

me that a friend of his was intimate with Lady Monkton, and he intended to call on this friend the next time he went to London, and get her to introduce him to your late employer, Good, easy man, he knows the people here delight in titles. He thought if he could but come back and assure everyone Miss Dale stood high in Lady Monkton's favour, all rumours would die out."

Birdie was white as marble.

"He must not go!" she whispered hoarsely. "Oh! Mrs. Drake, don't despise me; but if Mr. Thorpe goes to Lady Monkton about me I must leave Triggington before he returns."

"Because you are not Brenda Dale at all, but one of Lady Monkton's daughters!" said Mrs. Drake, quickly. "I have known it for some weeks now."

"Who told you?"

"Do not tremble so, my dear. I am not going to betray you. No one told me; but I study the first column of the *Times*, and I read about a week after you came here of a Brenda Dale's marriage with Dr. Carrington. I heard from a friend of mine that the said Brenda had been a humble companion in Lady Monkton's family. Long ago I knew Sir Lionel, and I traced a resemblance to him in your features. My dear little friend, is the breach between you and your family irreparable? Won't you be persuaded by me, and go home to your mother?"

"I cannot!"

"And you wish to remain as Brenda Dale? You mean to continue teaching?"

"I must!"

"Then, my dear, I know of just the post to suit you. My niece, Lady Elsingham, needs a governess for her two little girls. She has had terrible sorrows this year. Her husband and little son were killed in a railway accident. From an idolised wife, with the prospect of a coronet and great wealth, she became a widow but slenderly provided for. I am sure you will like Sybil; and I can answer for it that she will not object to your beauty and refinement."

"But if the Vicar calls on Lady Monkton?"

"He will not call when once you have left Triggington. Let me tell Mr. Thorpe to-morrow that you resign the school at Christmas to go and live with Lady Elsingham. You may depend upon it you will have no more trouble!"

Brenda thanked her warmly.

"My dear, you are welcome. What is an old woman good for if she cannot smooth the path of girls like you. If you want to do me a service, Miss Dale, you will come up on Tuesday evening with your music. I have a young gentleman coming to dinner, and I have no idea how to amuse him!"

"Surely Miss Thorpe—"

"I don't like either of the three well enough to introduce them to Lord Fernley, my dear; he is coming at my request. I am going to make my will, and bequeath what I can to Sybil and her children. As the head of their father's family, I want the Earl to be trustees to the little maids. He is only five-and-twenty, but I hear golden reports of him everywhere."

CHAPTER VI.

"BRENDA DALE!" said Lord Fernley, gravely, when Mrs. Drake told him the name of the young lady whom she had selected as governess to his little cousins. "Do you know she is connected with the saddest episode of my life. When I last saw her she lived with the Monktons, and—and I loved Birdie Monkton better than life itself."

A faint glimmering of the truth came to Mrs. Drake. She resolved to keep back from him that her *protégée* was not Lady Monkton's humble companion, but one of her daughters. She said, gravely,—

"Then I wonder you have not told her so. I can imagine few young ladies who would refuse to be Countess of Fernley."

"She died about a year ago. I have been trying to find Miss Dale, hoping to hear from her the particulars of my Birdie's last illness."

Mrs. Drake felt puzzled. He spoke so confidently, and yet, in that long talk on Sunday, had not the little schoolmistress confessed that she was, in deed and in truth, Birdie Monkton?

"I think," said the old lady, in a strangely gentle tone, "it would be pleasanter for you and Miss Dale to meet alone. She has promised to come up to sing to us this evening, but there is no reason why you need not call on her first. She is free any time after four o'clock."

It was about half-past five when Lord Fernley reached the little cottage. No answer came to his tap, so he lifted the latch and entered. The sounds of a piano guided him to the little sitting-room, and there his heart seemed to stand still. This was the home of the village schoolmistress, Brenda Dale; and yet, there before him in the firelight, he saw a grey-robed girl, with his wife's sweet face.

She started at the sound of his entrance, and turned to see who had broken in upon her solitude. For one instant they looked into each other's eyes—husband and wife, though strangers yet! The next, Basil had thrown his arm around the slight figure, and gathered it to his heart.

"My darling, they told me you were dead!"
"They said you had another wife," sobbed Birdie, "and that I could never be aught to you."

"And you believed them, sweetheart?"
"Oh, Basil, what could I think when you left my poor little letter unanswered, and never once wrote to me from India?"

"I never had your letter, Birdie, and I wrote from India by every mail until I had a letter from Miss Monkton, saying that her sister was dead, and begging me not to molest her sorrowing family."

"Maria wrote that! She must have opened your letters, and striven to part us!" said Birdie.

"I guessed, from the wording of her note, that she thought we were only lovers, not wedded husband and wife. And now, sweetheart, tell me, who made you believe I was not free when I married you?" replied Basil.

Birdie told him all, and he understood the strange labyrinth of mistakes that had parted them.

"It was a fellow pupil at Glyn's," he said, gravely, "Bob Appleby. He looked the oldest of us all; but he was only nineteen, though he had contrived to put that halter round his neck. Birdie, don't you want to know what has brought me back to England?"

She clung to him a little closer.

"I don't think I mind, Basil, so that you are here, and that you belong to me."

"To you, and you only, jealous little girl. And now, when will you be ready to come home? I don't like the Countess of Fernley teaching the rustics of Trigginton."

There was so much to explain on each side, such a great deal to say and hear, that Mrs. Drake was kept waiting half-an-hour for her dinner; but the sight of her guest's beaming face quite atoned to her for this, and she found the suspense, caused by the presence of the servants, far more trying.

But at last butler and footman had departed, and Basil turned to his hostess with a smile.

"You must try and find Lady Elsingham another governess please, Mrs. Drake, for I cannot spare my wife!"

Trigginton never heard quite all the story. Lord Fernley, on the advice of his lawyer, pleaded with Beatrice to let him marry her over again. They were man and wife truly, he told her; but to avoid a nine days' wonder, and much gossip, he thought they had better plight their troth again, and after much demur she consented.

Mrs. Darwent, old Mrs. Drake, Dr. Carrington and his pretty wife were aware that the

splendid ceremony at St. George's, Hanover-square, was unnecessary; but the world at large is content to know that Lord Fernley married the youngest Miss Monkton, and loved her long before he came into his title.

A cruel chance—so the story runs—parted the two lovers; and Miss Monkton, dropping her name and rank, went to teach in a village school, because she could not bear to live in luxury without her lover.

The three Miss Thorpes have quite forgotten their old animosity, and always declare that in the days of her disguise they were Lady Fernley's bosom friends.

Of course Maria Monkton's fraud and its motive transpired; but Beatrice treated her mother and sister better far than they deserved. With her husband's consent she settled five thousand a year on them for their joint lives, and assured them of what they prized less—her full and free forgiveness.

Trigginton school still flourishes, and now boasts a proper trained mistress, who is ugly enough to satisfy even the Miss Thorpes. Her cookery class meets in the room where Birdie's piano used to stand.

Miss Stubbs is a worthy young woman, and a splendid teacher; but she will never be so popular with the children as was the sweet-faced girl whom Jos Sanders drove from Dring station that blazing summer afternoon, and who was for so long "THE VILLAGE MYSTERY."

[THE END.]

A THANKSGIVING SURPRISE.

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THE brief autumn day was drawing to a close; the last level beams of the saffron-tinted sunset were peeping through the plate-glass casements of the great fashionable shop, and Bessie Brown, tortured with a splitting headache and wearied with the incessant buzz of questioning voices, pressed both her hands over her forehead, and asked herself—

"Will six o'clock never come? Will these people never go?"

The shop-walker came up.

"Miss Brown," said he, sharply, "what ails you to-day? I have heard more than one complaint. It is simple inattention? or don't you care whether you retain your position here or not?"

Bessie looked piteously up.

"My head aches so!" said she. "But I didn't know. What can I do, please?"

"Here's a lady asking for Suede-coloured gloves, and you've taken out the box of blacks," said Mr. Sims, impatiently. "Really, this won't do!"

Bessie murmured a word or two of apology, substituted the colours for the blacks, and set herself to be as attentive as possible.

Headache or no headache, it behoved her to give satisfaction. She had not only herself to support, but the ailing mother, whose board she paid at a cousin's farmhouse in the country. To her every shilling meant its full worth, and when she saw girl customers of her own age scattering the contents of their purses with reckless disregard, she could but wonder.

But when the crowd of shoppers had ebbed and flowed itself away, and the much-betumbled and becrumpled "stock" was replaced in boxes and on shelves, and the girls were departing, Bessie came to Mr. Time's desk.

"Well?" he said, impatiently, biting the handle of his pen, as he glanced up from the big book before him.

"Mr. Time," faltered she. "I haven't had any vacation this year. Can I have a week at the New Year?"

Mr. Time frowned.

"You had the chance in August," said he. "No, we can't spare you at New Year, Miss Brown. Three of the girls in your depart-

ment have been ahead of you in securing that time, and, as you must know, we are extra busy at this time of year."

"I couldn't go in August," said Bessie.

She did not like to tell the superintendent that she had lent her salary for the month of August to another girl, to pay for a sea-coast trip for her consumptive sister, that the sister had died, and that May Clare had never been able to repay the indebtedness.

How true is it that "it is the poor who are good to the poor!"

"Couldn't I possibly—"

"No, you couldn't!" said Mr. Time, and turned to his big books as if the case were closed.

Bessie Brown went quietly home to the solitary hall bedroom that she shared with a hollow-eyed tailor's, whose cough kept her awake half the night.

They made themselves a cup of fabulously weak tea, and nibbled at bread-and-butter.

They sat with shawls around them, and left the door into the hall open, in hopes that some current of warmth from the downstairs rooms might set their way.

"Oh, here's a letter for you, which I'd nearly forgotten!" said Miss Jessop. "It got slipped under the bread plate."

Bessie opened it and read it eagerly. Then her head dropped on her hands; she burst into tears.

"No bad news, I hope," said her friend, who was mending the worsted gloves which had so often been mended before.

"No," said Bessie. "Nothing but what I might have expected. The old house is sold—to somebody from Scotland!"

"But it hasn't been really yours for a long while, has it?" said Miss Jessop.

"Well, no!" Bessie admitted. "But as long as Mr. Ball owned it there was some chance of our buying it back. When I first came to London, you know, I was sure I could sell the novel I had written and rebuild the family fortunes. I fancied it was only a matter of a year or two. Now I know what nonsense it was. No matter. I'm young, and tolerably strong. But it'll come hard on mother—poor mother!—who has kept hoping all her lifetime for things that never came. I've got to wait to her, now, that I can't be at home for the New Year. They won't spare me!"

Miss Jessop shrugged her thin shoulders.

"Well," said she, "what you haven't got you can't miss. I never had a New Year holiday!"

Bessie did not answer. She was thinking of the red November sun, the aromatic scent of dead leaves, the sound of church bells chiming across the frosty fields, the smell of burning beech logs on the old stone hearth.

And all that night long, when poor Miss Jessop slept and coughed by turns, Bessie Brown lay awake and thought about the New Year.

She was unusually quiet and dejected the next day.

Mr. Time frowned a little.

"We want our girls to be spry and smiling," said he. "The customers don't like to see a death's head-and-bones behind the counter!"

So Bessie tried to look cheerful, while all the time she was asking herself—

"How could Harry Bell break his promise to me? How could he let his father sell the old home, when he told me I should have the refusal of it? Of course, I couldn't buy it; but the blow wouldn't have come so sudden if I had known beforehand."

Miss Jessop was full of a new plan when Bessie came home that night.

"Bessie," said she, "you felt bad about losing your holiday. Let's have a little one of our own. A chicken won't cost much—poultry is always cheap if you wait until the night before a holiday. And Mrs. Letts will let us cook it in her oven, and we could have a few roast chestnuts and two red apples, and a cranberry tart from the baker's. It won't cost so much if we join together."

"But it wouldn't be a real New Year," said Bessie, shaking her head, with a sad smile. Just then the postman's knock sounded in the hall below.

Down flew Bessie, and returned with another letter, directed this time in a stiff handwriting.

Bessie turned pale.

"Open it, Kitty," said she. "I can't. Either mother's sick or—of she's dead!"

"Neither one nor the other," said Kitty Jessop, who had made haste to break the seal. "Shall I read it to you?"

"DEAR BESSIE,—Come over at the New Year, and bring your friend Miss Jessop with you. Do not fail. It is to be a surprise to your mother. So no more at present.
"From your cousin,

"MARY ANSTEE."

Bessie grew red and white.

"Oh, but I can't!" said she.

"Oh, but you must!" said Miss Jessop.

"What will Mr. Fenn say?"

"What he pleases. Oh, Bessie, we are such slaves all our life long, do let us have one free moment, and risk the consequences!"

The impulse came into Bessie's cheek.

"We will!" said she.

It was a stormy sunset that brooded, in its red magnificence, over the valley that night; and as Bessie and Miss Jessop stepped off the train it seemed as if it were but yesterday she had left them.

Mrs. Anstey was at the station, rattleband and short-breathed as ever.

"There's a trap outside," said she. "Wait a spell, girls, till the train's gone by. The horse he's frightened a little."

"But what do you want of a trap?" said Bessie. "It isn't a quarter of a mile to your house, Cousin Mary!"

"We ain't goin' there!" said Mrs. Anstey. "Your ma, she's moved."

"Moved! Oh, Mary, I know I haven't been able to be very regular in the payments of late," said Bessie, a sudden confusion coming into her throat; "but surely—surely you haven't let them take her to the workhouse?"

"Well, I guess not!" said Mrs. Anstey. "Get into the trap. You'll see!"

Harry Bell was driving. Bessie viewed him sternly, scarcely returning his nod.

"You are not vexed with me, Bessie?" said he.

"You have broken your word," said she, in a low voice, while Mrs. Anstey pointed out the various places of interest to Kitty Jessop. "You did it out of spite; because—because I wouldn't—marry you."

"I may be a pretty mean man, Bessie," said he, "but I ain't as mean as all that. Get up, Bessie!" with a lash across the old red horse's hind back.

And they drove along in silence, until—

"Stop!" cried Bessie. "Here's the old home. Stop, Harry, and let me have one look at it. And there are lights in the window! Look, Kitty, there's the window where I used to peep out winter nights and watch for Santa Claus's coming. There's the big flat stone where we used to play jack-straws, and the apple-tree, where the red gillflowers grew. And, oh, Kitty, am I dreaming? There's mother coming out to the gate to meet me, just as she always did. Drive on, Harry! I—I think my brain must be going."

"I guess we won't drive on," said Harry Bell, alighting and deliberately tying the scree horses to the post. "Your brain's all right, Bessie. It is your mother; and you'll come home again, just like you always did. The house's your mother's, Bessie; I decided it for her. I bought it of father with the profits I made in the Dingleby mine. I never felt quite satisfied about that foreclosed business, and this is what I call the restitution money!"

"But," cried Bessie, "the old furniture—the dear, old clock and the high-topped chair—"

"I managed all that," said Harry, simply.

"I sort of planned to have it all dovetailed in by New Year's Day. You see, Bessie, I know right well you don't love me; but for all that, no one can stop me from loving you and working to make you happy. I couldn't anyhow stand the idea of your being shut up in that big city shop like a bird in a cage. Go in, Bessie. Don't you see your mother waitin' for you?"

"But—but you'll come and spend New Year's Day with us to-morrow, Harry?" faltered Bessie, still lingering out under the lilac bushes, although her hand was tightly clasped in her mother's.

"Do you want me to, Bessie?"

"Yes, I do."

"Then I'll come!"

Back to the old hearth ran Bessie. The familiar cricket still chirped between its stones; the little sang the same sleepy tune over the fire.

"Oh, mother, mother," she gasped, "how happy I am! Oh, how can we ever pay Harry Bell back?"

The little, black-robed widow smiled as she took a pan of hot biscuit out of the oven and set the steaming teapot further back on the stove.

"There's only one way, daughter, that I know of," said she. "You've sneered at honest Harry and laughed at him all these years; but now—"

"Now," said Kitty Jessop, turning Bessie around so that she could look full into her eyes—"now she loves him. I can see it in her eyes. Ah, Mrs. Brown, time has taught her more lessons than one!"

And Mrs. Anstey, singing the pinfeathers off a fat young turkey in the back kitchen, mused to herself—

"Well, I shouldn't wonder if that tangle came straight after all. Me and Anstey got engaged on New Year's Day. It always was a lucky time."

FACETIE.

It is a peculiarity of hotel salads that they are always better decorated than they taste. Impeccant young men admire virtue. They always trade with tailors who are distinguished for creditable acts.

A woman may not be able to find her pocket, but she never has it filled with letters she has forgotten to mail.

HIS PRAYER MEETING.—Wife: "Did you go to prayer meeting last night?" Husband: "Yes." Wife: "How did you come out?"

"Talk!" cried Poncey, "she can't say a word. Why, I talked to her half an hour last night, and she never opened her mouth—except to yawn!"

SKINKINT: "What would you say if I asked you to take a drink at my expense?" Oldboy: "Wouldn't say anything. I'd just simply faint."

"What brought the wrinkles in that man's face, papa?" "Care." "Oh! What brought the wrinkles in his coat, papa?" "Want of care." "Oh!"

The tendency of the fashionable woman of to-day to rapidity of life is very pronounced. Then follows a mist, a weeping rain, and life is never the same again.

JUDAS: "Then your husband has ill-treated you?" Witness: "No, your worship."

"What? Did he not bite off one of your ears?" "No, your worship; I did it myself."

TOMMY: "Mamma, can't you tell me a new fairy story?" Mrs. Figg: "I don't know any new ones, Tommy. Maybe your father will tell me some when he comes in to-night."

The fun that a man has in watching a woman sharpen a pencil is only equalled by the quiet amusement the woman experiences while the man is endeavouring to thread a needle.

"John, I wish you didn't have to take so many different kinds of medicine!" "Why, wife?" "Cause, then I wouldn't have to put up all my catnip in different kinds of bottles."

COO. VERON: "Why do you look so downcast? Lost anything?" Judge Peterby: "Not exactly. In fact, when I think of it, it is a relative gain. You see, there's a new kid in the house."

Mrs. OLDFURSE: "Yes, I called on Mrs. Newcomer to-day. I think I'm going to like her. She took me at once into her confidence." Mrs. PNEUMONIA: "Did she? Now tell me how it's furnished, I'm dying to know."

A RUSSY hotel guest, who had compelled the porter to move his luggage frequently and needlessly, remarked that he always liked to have his trunk under his eyes. "You should have been born an elephant," was the reply."

A NEWLY-ENGLISH father has just signified his desire for reconciliation with the family prodigal by the following curt telegram: "Mr. —, Sydney, Australia. That veal spread is ready whenever you are."

JIBBY: "I called upon Miss Guinevere Boggs last night. I am afraid I've hurt her mother's feelings?" Bibby: "Why so? Did she say anything?" Jibby: "Oh no! She only poured a pail of water on me from the upper window."

"I NEVER was as sleepy in my life as I was last night, but I had to stay awake on my feet till morning. But I had one grim satisfaction, at least; I wasn't alone." "Who was the other victim or victims?" "The baby; he didn't sleep a wink, either."

OLD LADY (to butcher): "Meat is so dear now I can hardly afford to buy any." Butcher: "Perhaps you had better turn vegetarian, mum." Old Lady: "A vegetarian! No, indeed, I was born and brought up a Baptist, and it's too late to change my religion now."

TEACHER: "Thomas, you are not paying attention! Why do you smile?" Thomas: "I was just thinking about something." Teacher: "Well, please bear in mind that if you want to think you have got to do it outside of this schoolhouse."

A MINNEAPOLIS husband gave the alarm that his wife had mysteriously disappeared and 400 people turned out to search for her. After eighteen hours of search she was found in her own bed, where she had retired to sleep because her husband said the potatoes weren't done enough.

"Now, madam," said the little bracer, "here is an elegant bronze vase in genuine reproduction work. The nautical scene on this side represents 'Jonah and the Whale.' 'I only see the whale; where's Jonah?' 'You note that distention near the tail?' 'Yes.' 'Well, that's Jonah.'"

He looked at her, took a few steps forward, stopped, turned and gave her another look. She looked flattered, though pleased; she blushed; she giggled. Thus encouraged, he said, "I beg pardon, but I think you have my umbrella." "Sir!" she screamed, "how dare you insult a lady?" And she walked off with the umbrella.

A ONE-LEGGED Yankee, named Kane, was pretty successful in bantering an Irishman, when the latter asked him, "How did you lose your leg?" "Well," said Kane, "on examining my pedigree I found there was Irish blood in me, and concluding it had settled in that leg I had it cut off." "By the powers," said Pat, "it would have been a better thing if it had settled in your head."

Mrs. HUBBY (a Harvard bride): "It would be useless for me to disguise the fact, Bridget, that your ignorance of grammar is very marked. Let me try to correct you. For instance, does it sound right for me to say, 'Bridget, you've been a-settin' in the drawin'-room?' Bridget (frankly): "No, ma'am, it don't sound right; but I were only a-settin' there the mother of a half hour or so wid my cousin Terence, who is just over. I 'pose that rant of a second girl tattled on me."

SOCIETY.

A NOVELTY that may in time supersede the use of matches is the magic lamp, which, filled with oil and caps, strikes and lights a wick by a pressure of the thumb.

PLAY-PARTIES have for the time being apparently superseded small dances and other seasonable entertainments in fashionable circles.

We have revelled so long in high collars that a change has come in, and an attempt is now being made to wear only a thin pleating at the throat, which is cut somewhat low.

THE Queen has had a copy of the Jewish burial service sent to her, as she expressed a wish to see it after the death of Lady Rosebery, and it has been placed in the Royal library.

THEY say that King Milan, the ex-King of Servia, was very anxious to see the Queen, but Her Majesty expressed herself pretty plainly on the subject, and refused to meet His ex-Majesty.

A DELIGHTFUL invention for children is the box of "Magic Leaves," apparently a series of clean white sheets of paper, with a pretty border. When however, they are lightly rubbed with coloured crayon pencils, a variety of remarkably good designs appear.

CONDUITS have become very popular for draperies and curtains, and is now made in all the new shades of blue, green, old red and brown.

IT is, indeed, a well-known fact in St. Petersburg that the health of the Emperor is such as to give rise to the gravest anxiety, and many of the recent measures which have caused such widely felt discontent are attributed to the morbid condition of the Czar's mind.

THE greatest relaxation of Kaiser Wilhelm is the time he spends with his children, whose education he personally supervises. The Emperor devotes nearly the whole of her day to the care of the little Princess, who are taught to go to their father or mother with all their little troubles.

SOME ladies in New York are reported to be contemplating the publishing of a daily newspaper for ladies. If the project comes to anything it will be interesting to see what sort of journalistic wares will be provided.

A NEW fad, evolved from some Yankee woman's active brain, is the heart party. No one present could be called heartless, for hearts prevailed. The tables were hearts, the favours were hearts; and as usual, the women were left heart.

UNTIL quite recently the occupants of apartments in Hampton Court Palace could lend their quarters, in the event of their going away for a time. Now, however, no apartment can be lent, even for a day, without a formal permission having been obtained from the Lord Chamberlain.

WE notice that if it is suggested in a conversation that piano-funing might be practised with advantage by women. We do not think the well-meaning lady who has originated this notion is quite aware of the physical strain in the work.

FIFTEEN keen and courageous Corsicans form the Czar's bodyguard. They accompany the Czar almost everywhere, sometimes in disguise, sometimes in uniform; and have even to keep watch in the imperial kitchen, and occasionally act as cooks. Three of them can never be convinced that the wine has not been drugged, and they insist upon "tasting" fresh bottles three or four times a day.

NOW that the flat of eight o'clock dinners seems likely to go forth, it is interesting to remember that that was the hour at Court at the time of the Queen's marriage, and that the Prince Consort, accustomed to the still earlier hours of the Fatherland, found himself even then yawning at ten o'clock.

STATISTICS.

BEES can fly 20 per cent. faster than pigeons.

THERE are 347 female blacksmiths in England.

OUT of something like 100,000 parcels sent through the Parcel Post every day only two go astray.

TEETH, a strange article of commerce, were imported last year into this country to the value of £573,820.

WE lose two pounds of water every 24 hours by perspiration, and the more we perspire the cooler we become. There are 27,000,000 pores on the surface of our bodies, which, if placed in a line, would extend 28 miles in length.

GEMS.

HUMAN life has not a surer friend, nor many times a greater enemy, than hope.

EVERY man is a volume, if you know how to read him.

WERE man but constant, he were perfect; that one error fills him with faults.

IN order to love mankind, we must not expect too much from them.

THE true reply to the question, is life worth living is: It all depends on the kind of life you live.

NEVER let a day pass without thinking seriously, if only for a moment, of death. It will rob it of more than half its terrors.

WHEN you are right you cannot be too radical, and when you are wrong you cannot be too conservative.

AN old deacon used to pray: "Lord, help us to see through ourselves." We are frequently reminded of this position when persons of quick discernment in other directions show themselves woefully lacking in a knowledge of their own flaws and faults of character. To see deep down into one's inner motives and ambitions makes us strong ourselves, and qualifies us better to bless the world.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

BREAKFAST PUFFS.—Whites of five eggs, yolks of five eggs, one quart flour, salt. Beat yolks well, add beaten whites. Mix with flour, and bake in gem-pans in quick oven.

VINEGAR CANDY.—Two cups of sugar, one-half a cup of water, four teaspoonsful of vinegar; stir and mix thoroughly before putting on the stove, and do not stir often. Boil until the syrup crackles in cold water, then pour into a shallow tin to cool.

LITTLE SHORT CAKES.—Rub into a pound of dry flour four ounces of butter, four ounces of white powdered sugar, one egg and a spoonful or two of thin cream, to make it into a paste. When mixed, put currants into one half, and caraways into the rest. Cut them as before, and bake on tins.

BAKED APPLES.—Enough sour apples to fill baking-dish. Sugar, lemon, nutmeg. Pare apples and core (a very good "coter" is made of an old dipper handle, the smaller end made sharp by filing). Fill centres with sugar, and squeeze a little lemon juice upon it. Grate nutmeg lightly all over the apples, add water to moisten, and bake.

A USEFUL RECIPE.—Take 6oz. of flour, 4oz. of good beef dripping, 3oz. of currants well washed and dried, and a pinch of salt. Rub all these ingredients together, mix to a fairly stiff dough with water, roll out an inch thick, score the top with a knife, flour a hot baking-sheet, slip the cake on to it, and bake in a quick oven for a quarter of an hour. Another way is to substitute cream for the dripping. In either case it is served hot.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE one part of the world in which no native pipes and no native smokers have been found is Australia.

THE bed of Feather River in California, which has been laid bare, is found to be rich in gold. It is thought that ten to fifteen millions dollars' worth may be taken out.

TO check the evil of usury, the municipal councils of many small towns in Russia have established pawn houses, in which money is loaned at a very low rate of interest.

THE submarine war-boat has led to the flying of balloons from war-ships. A balloon hovering over a ship, it is claimed, can detect every movement of a submarine boat coming to the attack.

THE colonies are gradually taking a greater share of the food bill of Great Britain. Victoria is now sending butter to England, and an incoming mail steamer brings no less than eighty tons.

THE best pictures so far taken of the moon show that parallel walls, whose tops are no more than 200 yards or so in width, and which are not more than 1,000 or 1,200 yards apart, are plainly visible.

RAILWAY STATISTICS show that no one car on a train is safer than another. Sometimes the last car is the only one to drop through a bridge, and again the first coach climbs on the top of baggage car. Pay your fare, have faith, and take your chances.

AN ingenious Japanese druggist has discovered a process by which wild hemp may be used for a fabric so closely resembling silk in its lustre, pliability and lasting quality that the difference cannot easily be detected. As the plant grows wild, the article can be sold at a much lower price than silk.

A COLD wave is technically described as "a fall of temperature in twenty-four hours of twenty degrees over an area of fifty thousand square miles, the temperature in some parts of this area descending to thirty-six degrees." Between 1880 and 1890 no less than six hundred and ninety-one cold waves were recorded in the United States.

TAKE a sheet of pasteboard as large as Hyde Park, cut it up into slips an inch and a quarter wide and two and a quarter inches long, and you will have rather less than the number of railway tickets used in this island during the last twelve months. Put the slips end to end, and you will have a ribbon that will reach right round the world.

ALL over Berlin are what are called "molkereis," or milk stations. In the basement of an elegant block of buildings a few cows are kept. They are well fed and cared for, and furnish excellent milk for the patrons in the neighbourhood. They water the cows instead of the milk, and it is a better quality than most city milk.

THE Japanese believe that if an accident happens at the launch of a vessel she is doomed to bad fortune for the whole of her career. At Osaka lately a vessel capsized while being launched; several persons being drowned, and her owners determined to destroy her at once before the unlucky craft produced a further catastrophe. The destruction was carried out by night with much ceremony.

IF M. Janssen can persuade the French authorities, it is probable that before the century is ended we shall have an observatory as near the summit of Mont Blanc as it is possible to erect a habitable dwelling. That will put the observatory on Ben Nevis quite into the shade, and even the Lick Observatory will be in the second rank. M. Janssen has recently been up the mountain, and has made careful notes of the difficulties; but gives a decided opinion that it is possible to establish a station on what is practically the "summit" of Mont Blanc—or, at least, an elevation of 15,000 feet or more above the level of the sea.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

JEAN.—The 2nd of October, 1841, was on a Saturday.
J. T. (Foplar).—The Coldstream Guards is an infantry regiment.

LUCKY.—Blair Athol carried 8st. 10lb. when he won the Derby in 1864.

THE SQUIRE.—The cost of an auctioneer's license is £10 per annum.

RAVE.—Lord Consmara has resigned the Governorship of Madras.

ALPHA.—If the club is not registered it cannot be sued in the county court.

R. W.—The Earl of Lincoln is a title borne by the Duke of Newcastle.

ALBERT H.—Yes, if the marriage took place since the beginning of 1853.

TERENCE.—A boy or girl of the age of fifteen may be employed as a "young person," under the Factories Act.

TRAVELLER.—The French people hold the largest number of shares in the Suez Canal, but the largest individual shareholder is the British Government.

PORKED DICK.—"The Eroles vein" means loud or violent. See Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream," the character of Bottom the Weaver.

HELEN.—A sewing-maid is not expected to be a proficient dressmaker, but to be able to do the cutting and fitting of underclothing.

J. R.—Patrick and Peter are quite dissimilar; they have no connection. The first is probably French, the second is certainly Hebrew.

NEWMAN NOON.—If your wife carries on business for her own profit, and independently of you, your property is not liable for her debts.

OLD JEM.—We know of no law preventing a hawkker selling tobacco, providing that he has a license to sell tobacco as well as one for hawking.

G. L.—Alum is believed by medical men to check the secretions of the alimentary canal, and consequently to tend to produce indigestion and constipation.

MINA.—A husband can be compelled to contribute to the support of his wife only when she becomes chargeable to the parish.

H. R. H.—1. June 14, 1856. 2. The eldest son of the Prince of Wales is next to him in succession to the Throne.

THE MIX.—We are not aware of any book on the use of the bath. Of course, the subject falls naturally within the range of any book on health, but there is hardly room for a whole book about it.

C. C. C.—If the wife is still living the man cannot marry again without obtaining a divorce—no matter what the misconduct of the wife, or whatever the length of absence.

VICTOR.—The sanitary officers can require that the cellars in private dwelling houses, if in a state injurious to health, shall be cleaned and lime-washed whenever that is needed.

HARLING.—When Mr. Gladstone first acted in the double capacity of First Lord and Chancellor he drew one salary only; latterly, when the work came heavily upon him he drew salary and half.

VERA.—You must ascertain the parish in which the marriage took place, and then search the register. That is the only way. There was no general registration at the time.

ATALANTA.—It is impossible to say what is the highest speed attained by a shorthand-writer, but the ability to write shorthand at a rate of 100 words per minute denotes very exceptional powers.

WATCHED MARY.—It is on record that half-an-ounce of ground quassia steeped in a pint of vinegar is an effective cure for drink craving, a teaspoonful being taken in water every time the craving is felt.

DEBT.—1. An I O U is good for any amount. 2. A will, for which a printed form may be bought of any stationer for a few pence, would be necessary to protect your mother's interest in the property.

GENERAL.—All the liabilities of the deceased will have to be met out of the estate; of the balance the widow will take £500, or one-third, and the rest will be equally divided among the children.

BELLA.—If you mean widows of soldiers who were in the Crimea, but returned in safety to this country, there is no relief for them. But widows of men killed in the Crimea should write to the secretary of the Patriotic Fund, 53, Charing-cross, London, S.W.

F. BROWNE.—You can write to any of the owners whose names you see at advertisements in the papers; but if you desire to go as an apprentice writing will hardly serve your purpose. It is necessary to call, in order that you may be seen, and then a heavy premium or deposit is usually demanded by the shipowner.

FOOD OF FZ.—Much is said, has been said, and will, doubtless, yet be said, against pork eating; but the fact yet remains that tender, well-fattened and moderately lean pork is an excellent article of food for multitudes of people. The denunciations against pork should be levelled at the growing of pork in filthy quarters with filthy food, rather than against pork in general.

GOLD.—Durban is the nearest British port to all the South African goldfields, although that does not mean that it is next door to them, they being, in fact, not far short of 300 miles distant. Still, that is not counted much in South Africa, and it would not deter your husband from venturing his fortune in that direction.

CONNECT.—It seems impossible to avoid typographical errors entirely. There is an old story of the one perfect book ever printed, after almost infinite pains had been taken to make it typographically correct. When it was finished the word "book" was found on the first page printed with three c's.

C. E. (Walworth).—We have not the information ourselves, nor are we able, we regret to say, to direct you to any reliable source from which you may gain the desired facts. One thing, however, is certain, you must not think of going out on "spes" except you have good introductions, as the law against unemployed Europeans is very rigidly enforced.

ONLY A BOY.—An aguilette is a bagged point hanging from the shoulder upon the breast, in some military uniforms in Europe. Also a braid or cord worn from one shoulder across the breast; formerly used in the uniform of certain portions of the United States Army. The word is pronounced as if spelled a-gu-let, the accent on the last syllable.

MARTIN.—The garrote is a mode of execution practised in Spain and the Spanish colonies. The criminal is seated, and leans his head back against a support prepared for it. An iron collar closely encircles the throat, and the executioner turns a screw, the point of which penetrates the spinal marrow where it unites with the brain, and causes instantaneous death.

THE CHEERFUL HEART.

"The world is ever as we take it,
And life, dear child, is what we make it."

Thus spoke a grandma bent with care,
To little Mabel, flushed and fair.

But Mabel took no heed that day
Of what she heard her grandma say.

Years after when, no more a child,
Her path in life seemed dark and wild,

Back to her heart the memory came
Of the quaint utterance of the dame;

"The world, dear child, is as we take it,
And life, be sure, is what we make it."

She cleared her brow, and smiling thought
'Tis even as the good soul taught.

And half my woes, thus quickly cured,
The other half may be endured.

No more her heart its shadow wore;
She grew a little child once more.

A little child in love and trust,
She took the world (as we, too, must)

In happy mood; and lo! it grew
Brighter and brighter to her view.

She made of life (as we, too, should)
A joy, and so! all things were good.

And fair to her, as in God's sight,
When first he said, "Let there be light."

G. TALBOT.—Alcohol gets its name from the Arabic al-kohol, the powder of antimony, with which the people in Asia stain their eyelids. This powder is very fine and pure, and the name was in time given in Europe to alcohol, because it is a pure extract; but the Arabs never used the word in that way. In other words, that signification of it was unknown in Arabia.

D. D. D.—There need be no argument. Let those who assert that the article exists, either produce it or say where it is to be seen or had. We assert that, except the imitation china eggs used as decoys to induce hens to lay in the nests and the sugar imitations made by confectioners, there is no such thing as an artificial egg in existence.

PETER.—Ipswich, England, was burned by the Danes in 991 and 1000, but afterwards in Saxon and Norman times achieved great prosperity. Some traces still exist of the castle built by William the Conqueror. Besides the grammar-school, which was restored by Cardinal Wolsey, now a fine building constructed since 1857, the town has several liberally-endowed schools and charities, and a workmen's college.

A. R.—An official list of the British Navy contains the names of 57 sea-going armour-clads, 15 coast-defence armour-clads, 17 deck-protected sea-service ships, 14 partially deck-protected sea-service ships, or 111 armour-clad vessels, about 130 unprotected sea-service ships, and 53 coast-defence unprotected ships. There is in addition a large fleet of torpedo boats, troopships, and sailing ships employed in harbour and other service.

LONG SERVICE.—A youth under eighteen who represents to the recruiting sergeant that he is over the age and is enlisted, will not be punished when his falsehood is discovered, except by being kept in the service. The War Office authorities decline to release those who have joined the service in this way except on payment of the customary £18 after three months, or £10 before that period elapses.

IN DOUBT.—1. A passenger going to the United States cannot take any spirits with him duty free; that is to say, he must limit himself to one bottle, obviously carried for private use. 2. If the gun has been in use, it will be passed free of duty as part of your private baggage. Customs officers are very liberal towards emigrants who make no attempt to hide doubtful articles of luggage.

HUGHES.—Born and birth are expansive phrases. It is quite permissible, for instance, to speak of the birth of day, the new-born year, and so on, meaning the day and year then dawning or beginning, so a "rose just newly born" is one which has burst from the bud. It is a poetic description, and you might as well propose to measure syrup with a tape-line as confine poets to rigid exactitude in the choice of their phrases.

VERA.—Los Angeles is situated in a fertile and picturesque plain watered by the Los Angeles River, and planted with numerous vineyards and orange groves. Semi-tropical fruits are grown in abundance in the vicinity of the city. Wheat and barley are also extensively grown, and sheep are raised in large numbers. In the mountains to the east of the city, gold, copper, asbestos and coal are mined.

AMTIE.—The following jingles are probably in the line of what you want, and are quoted from an interesting collection entitled "Old Superstitions":—

Marry Monday, for wealth,
Marry Tuesday, for health,
Marry Wednesday, the best day of all.
Marry Thursday, for crosses,
Marry Friday, for losses,
Marry Saturday, no look at all.

WORRIED.—The *Journal of Health* recommends as quite infallible the following remedy for curing the tendency to dandruff: Take borax, half a teaspoonful; common sulphur, one heaping teaspoonful; pour over it one pint of boiling water. When cool pour into a bottle; agitate frequently for three or four days, then strain. Moisten the scalp with this three or four times a week. It is one of the most reliable preparations known.

OLD SUBSCRIBER.—This is of no use. If all your information is to be gathered from books you had better not begin either to keep poultry or to attempt gardening with the view of making them "pay." It is only those who have been long enough in the business to know the mistakes to be avoided who are able to take money out of it. This is true, especially of poultry keeping. As regards the size of your garden, if you get the ground cheap, and have ready access to a large town, you may take as much of it as you can get—provided, as we say, you know what to do with it.

DESPAIRING MRS.—Words of warning against engaging in games with cardsharps in trains have been uttered until it seems superfluous to say more on the subject. When what has been so often printed passed unnoticed by your friend, what hope is there that anything we could say now would receive attention? Those who go through life with their eyes deliberately shut experience many a hard knock which they might have avoided by looking before them. You may state the facts of the case to the police, but we doubt nothing can be done towards bringing the miscreants to justice.

EMIGRANT.—Any man going either to the Cape or Australia must have at least £30 about him. Two-thirds of that will go for the voyage and outfit, while the remaining £10 should be in his pocket on landing. Going to the States or Canada £5 will cover the voyage, and another £5 or about that will cover the period between landing and the first job. There is nothing in the circumstances of the Australian Colonies or South Africa that should make them specially attractive at present. You should go either to the States or Canada in the early spring in order to be settled in a situation before the big rush begins. Wages about 9s. to 11s. daily.

CONVARIANT READER.—1. Jephthah, the ninth Judge of Israel, was the natural son of Gilead. He ruled Israel six years. The sacrifice of his daughter is the subject of odes by Handel and Beethoven. 2. The term Gethsemane means "garden of olives." The place was a small plot, or enclosure, occupying part of a level space between the brook Kedron and the foot of the mount. As now pointed out, it is said to "correspond in every particular with all the conditions of the Scripture narrative." It is about fifty paces square, and is enclosed by a wall of no great height, formed of rough loose stones. Eight very ancient olive trees now occupy this enclosure, some of which are very large size, and all exhibit symptoms of decay, clearly denoting their great age.

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